DanganRonpa96: Chimamire

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Characters:	Hayasaka Shunsuke, Kurumada Naomichi, Tsurugi Mai, Walter White, Jesse Pinkman, Saiki Kusuo, Kaidou Shun, Retsuko (Aggressive Retsuko), Natsuki (Doki Doki Literature Club!), Yuri (Doki Doki Literature Club!), Hiroshi (Ao Oni), Brian Pasternack, BoJack Horseman - Character, Latte Cookie (Cookie Run), L (Death Note), ENA (ENA)
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DanganRonpa96: Chimamire

by Kitsune_Rexx, lennardd

Summary

Being awoken on an island with no collective memory of how you got there, only to be forced into a death game with a bunch of strangers who appear to be rather... interesting to say the least, by a sadistic mechanical animal and a company you know nothing about except for their name, would be a less than pleasant, and more so impossible, situation, right?

Unfortunately for Hayasaka, that reality is all too real.

Whether he likes it or not, blood thirst will arise. It's not up to him, after all. He's just a nobody in the group, right?

Who will take the plunge into murder? Who will find themselves nothing but a corpse the morning after? And, well, more importantly, will the Devil befriend me for this?

(My 2ND killing game after DanganRonpa69 - I never learn, do I?)

Notes

ya mama

WHAT THE FUCK LENNARDD 2ND KILLING GAME? WHAT?!
I KNOW! It's crazy! To think I'd actually be back with another one of these is astonishing to say the least. Alas, the despair never ends. Back with a new cast from new fandoms, I hope these guys can live up to the OGs. Oh, what am I saying?! I love these new bitches! Hehe

However, this time around, I'm not working alone! My best pal, Kitsune Rexx, has helped me out with the story planning AND has provided their amazing talent to take on some of the CGs this time! You'll see them mingle between my art as well.

Also, just as a heads up, UNDERLINED WORDS ARE LINKS! They take you somewhere... special ;)

Well then, without further ado, I present to you my silly lil' story!!

PROLOGUE: Welcome to Your First Day on the Job!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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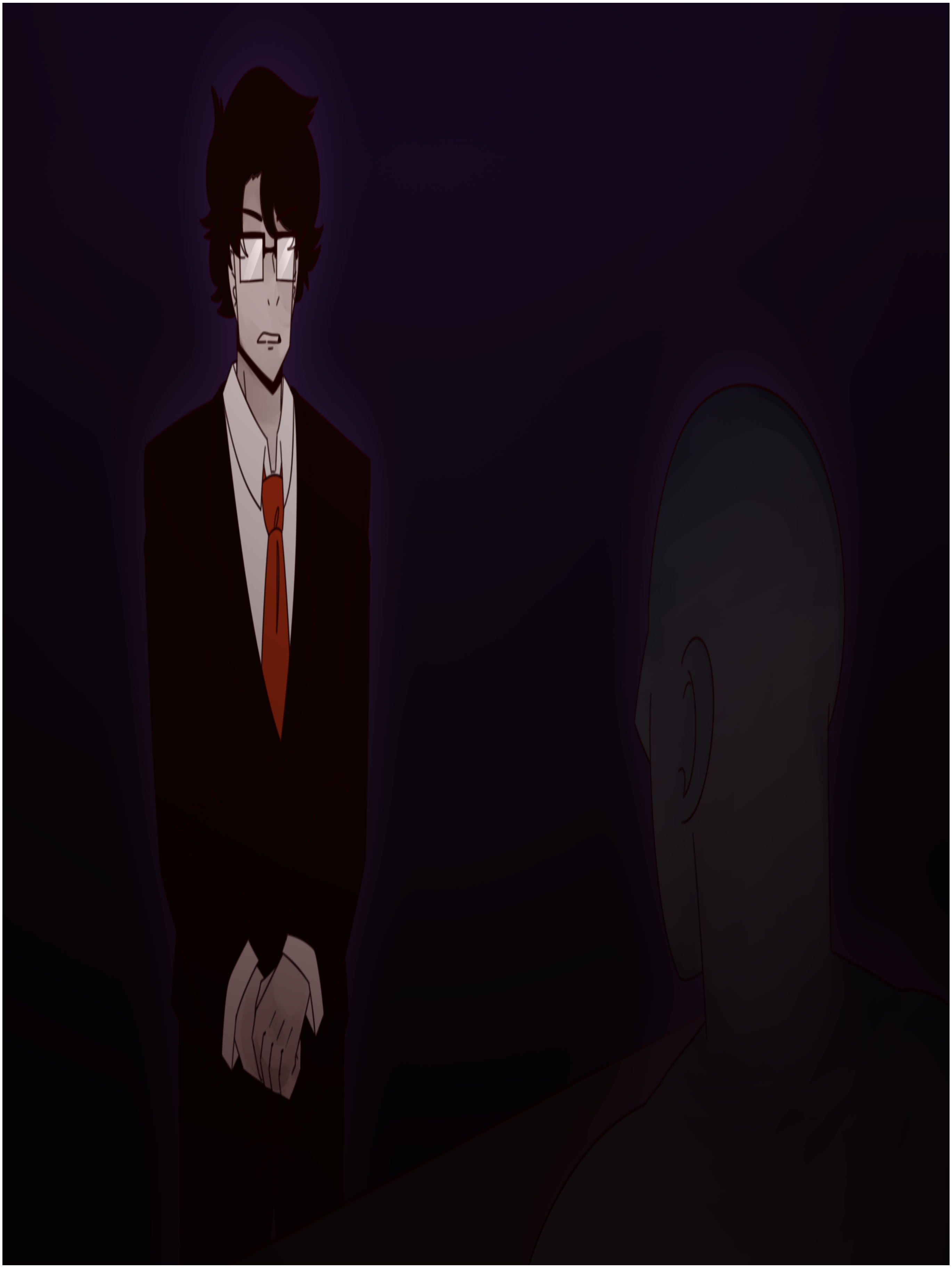

???#1: “Good afternoon.”

???#2: “You must be here to tell me something good.”

???#1: “There has been consistently faster progression concerning your plan.”

???#2: “...Go on.”

???#1: “The letters you requested have been sent out and have been received by the participants.”

???#2: “Good, good… And my mascot?”

???#1: “The manufacturing for your ‘mascot’ has been finalised. Testing will begin immediately.”

???#2: “Thank god. That wasn’t so hard, was it? Finally, I can drive out those *problems* .”

???#1: “If everything runs smoothly, we should be able to execute the main event very soon.”

???#2: “Much in my favour. Thank you, for not being completely useless. You can get lost now.”

???#1: “Will do.”

???#2: “Heheh… What a lucky turn of events. Oh man, I can’t wait for a certain someone to receive the pain and suffering that they deserved from day one. Just you wait, my old friend…”

“You’ll be surprised to see me again, I’m sure of that.”

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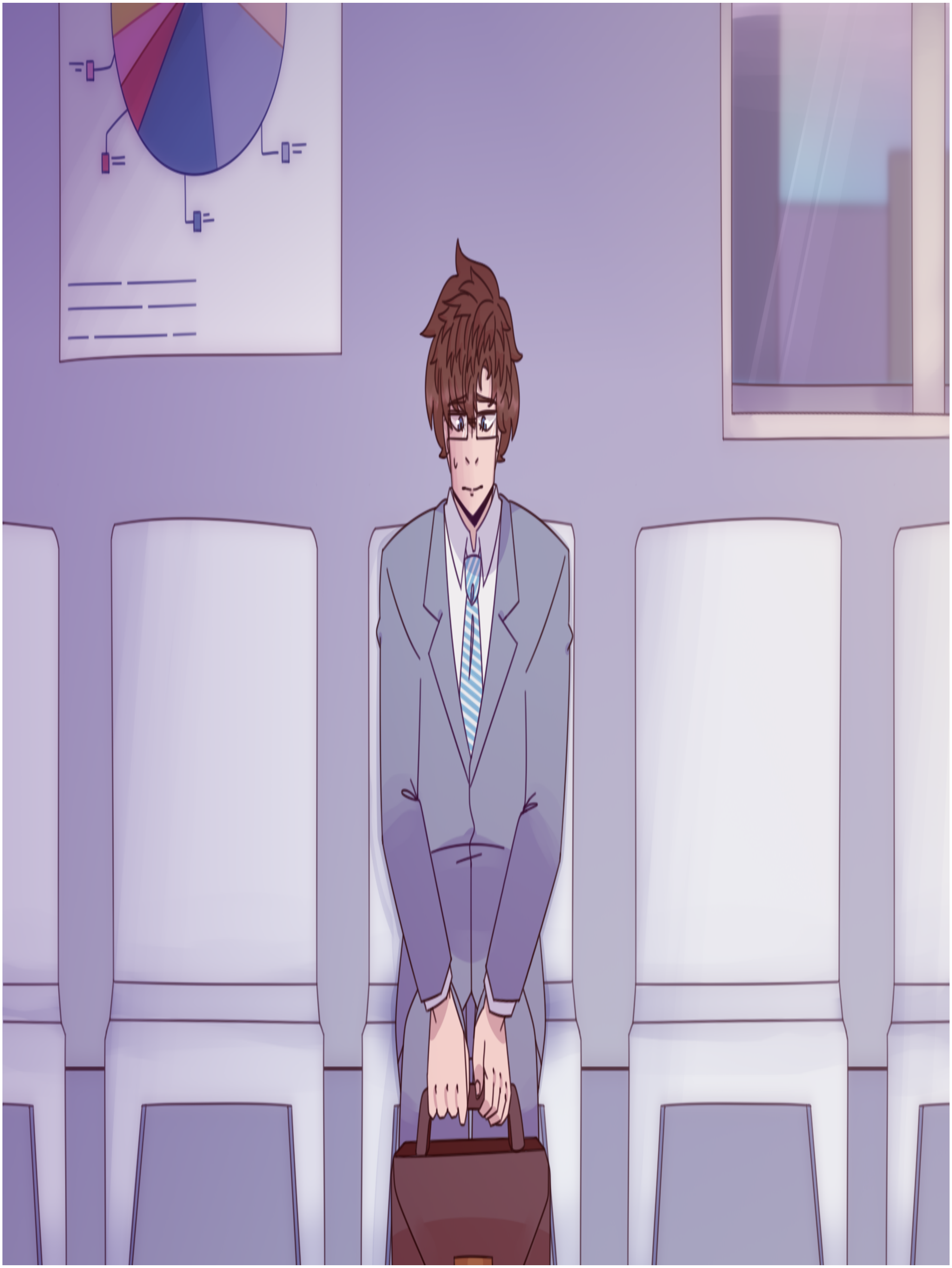
???: “ *Hoo boy…* ”



Shunsuke Hayasaka stepped into the waiting room of the unfamiliar building and swiftly sat down on one of the many empty chairs. The initial lack of life inside the room mildly surprised him at first, but ultimately did no improvement to his current anxiousness leading up to this point. He assumed that if the clock's hands in the rightmost corner of his eye was true to the current time, he had a few minutes to spare before his fateful interview.

Hayasaka's mind raced with questions: many questions he couldn't answer. That's what fueled his fear the most. The unknown. His hand gently drifted over his briefcase, flicking the locks open and reaching his hand down into the contents. Without letting his eyes leave the opposite wall he had quickly grown accustomed to staring at, he quickly retrieved a letter that had been neatly folded and read many times before. Hayasaka finally tore his eyes off the mundanely grey wall and studied the contents of the letter once more. He had received the letter a few weeks ago, signed by a company going by the name *Nesos* .

The Nesos Company is delighted to invite you to join our organisation , it began in the most corporate way possible, so much so it almost made Hayasaka shake his head at first. *After a long and dedicated examination of your current work, we have concluded that you are suitable for the role in our Ultimate Branch.* This part made him raise a brow. What they had meant by that, he did not understand. He had eventually assured himself that it was a fancy way of meaning a background check. The next part went over the logistics of the 'Ultimate Branch': Ultimates were also a fancy way of saying a field of talent one excels in. That would've been fine, if his talent wasn't apparently the 'Ultimate Office Worker'. It went on to say in compensation that he had been commended for his excellent skills in data management and avid policy complyment, however Hayasaka still struggled to accept any of it as a compliment.

The reason why he should bother joining the organisation was also discussed in the letter. *Money and a better life* . It didn't sound all that persuasive on it's own, but one quick glance at the promised salary almost made him quit his job right then and there on his first read. It felt almost too good to be true. But everything else seemed too eligible for it to be a cruel prank. Hayasaka wasn't an idiot, but he didn't want to potentially pass up the opportunity to richen his pockets (which weren't all that full in his current state). If he was anywhere remotely close to witty, he would've joked that they were aware of his current struggles and desires.

Unfortunately for him, the company had tasked him with the mission to keep this opportunity a secret, only until he had been officially hired, that is. Unfortunate, as he really wanted to confide in a second opinion: a friend, a family member, maybe even someone from his current job. And yet, those printed words were like a curse, scaring him from even hinting about it to anyone in the fears that he didn't know what would happen to him if he tried. All he managed to get out to the people closest to him was that he was planning to resign from his job and take up an interview with another company, which wasn't much of a lie at all.

Checking the date of the interview scribed on the letter one more time, Hayasaka finally looked back up into the reality of the room around him. Today was the day of the interview, where he was to arrive at a rather inconspicuous building and talk to a representative of the Nesos Company about his position.

Hayasaka: ("Halfway done with that… so far so good, haha. Although… Now I'm wondering if I'm actually in the right building. Am I supposed to be the only one here…? P-Perhaps this is just the secrecy Nesos has taken up so far: laying low by inviting one person at a time? ...I don't know.")

Hayasaka tucked the letter back into his briefcase, pursing his lips. He glanced at the clock. The hour had struck.

???: "Shunsuke Hayasaka. Please make your way into interview room B."

Startled by the unexpected noise of the intercom, Hayasaka composed himself and stood up. Adjusting his tie, he slowly walked towards the instructed door.

Hayasaka: ("At least I wasn't in wrong place…")

The door wasn't locked, as he managed to turn the handle easily. As he took his first step into the room hoping to finally see the other person inside however, his senses started to fade. Fast. Like a switch inside him had been ever so diligently flicked, everything came to a halt.

And the world went black.

***

???: ".........."

???: "..."

???: "... *ke up!* "

???: “ *Wake up for goodness sake, you lazy musclehead!* ”

Hayasaka: “ *Ngh* …”

Hayasaka’s consciousness washed over him like water trickling over his face. He gently opened his eyes, squinting almost immediately as he was greeted by a bright sky above him. A subconscious hand lifted to shield his vision from the blinding sun as he attempted to find his bearings. He felt hot. His back was burning. Heaving himself into a sitting position, he discovered the soft grain-like bed he was originally lying on was sand, golden and sparkling in the daylight.

Hayasaka: “W-Well that’s… *huh* ?”

He felt his throat dry up. His free hand scooped up a small amount of sand grains and lifted them into the air, watching them run down through his fingers like a dry waterfall. Mind still foggy from the unknown time he had been asleep, Hayasaka had *no clue what was going on* .

SLAP.

Hayasaka jolted at the harsh sound.

???: “O-OI! What the hell?! What the hell is goin’ on…?! Ow…”

???: “Oh, so you respond to that, huh?”

???: “Eh? Why’s my cheek… Did you fuckin’ hit me?!”

???: “I’ll be forced to do it again if you don’t get up.”

Hayasaka: (“Those voices… They sound… *familiar* . Is that…?”)

Hayasaka turned to his left.

Hayasaka: “ *K-Kurumada? Mai?* ”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka…?”

Mai: “Oh thank goodness you’ve woken up as well! I was getting worried that you were both actually dead!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?” (“What’s going on? Why are they…?”)

Kurumada: “Wait, why didn’t you slap *him* ?!”

Mai: “Because his skin’s too precious to be slapped, see? It’s so soft and gentle like a sweet bun! Yours on the other hand… Just be grateful I have my gloves on.”

Kurumada: “Oi!”

All Hayasaka could do was stare in confusion. Everything between his two friends felt as normal as any exchange he’d watch the two have in the past, but it was uncanny. Not with the sand underneath him. And the sound of the sea behind him. And the smell of the palm trees surrounding him. And the…

What ?

Hayasaka: “Ah… Hah… Huh…?”

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “W-We’re–”

Hayasaka frantically sprung about on the sand, legs kicking up sand as he scrambled onto his feet only to shuffle around as he looked about.

Hayasaka: “*– On an island?!”*

Kurumada: “Wait, what?!”

Mai: “Hurry up and focus, would you? We’re on an island, it seems…”

Hayasaka: “A-An island? A-A-An… Ahaha… W-What? What?!”

Kurumada: “Hey, hey–calm down! Hayasaka!”

Kurumada promptly jumped up and rushed over to Hayasaka, who had begun to curl his fingers around clusters of his hair, and decked his larger hands firmly on his shoulders.

Kurumada: “Ya gotta calm it down, alright?! Don’t start freakin’ out when I’ve just woken up!”

Mai: “Perhaps you should’ve woken up much earlier then.”

Kurumada: “Don’t start now, Mai! Hayasaka’s about to have a freakin’ panic attack!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m… I’m what?”

Mai: “Hayasaka dear–”

Mai walked up to the two, taking hold of one of Hayasaka’s hands.

Mai: “–Take deep breaths. The air is clean here.”

Breathless, Hayasaka closed his eyes and attempted to focus on his breathing. After the accumulation of what he considered enough deep breaths to calm him down, he opened his eyes again. A part of him hoped he was just hallucinating and that he’d see the three back home. Unfortunately he knew he’d never get that sort of satisfaction.

Hayasaka: “*... Where are we?* ”

Kurumada: “We’re still on an island. For some fuckin’ reason.”

The two let go of Hayasaka, giving him some space.

Kurumada: “And can I ask why we’re here? I don’t remember comin’ here, that’s for damn sure.”

Hayasaka: (“Actually, now that he mentions it… I don’t remember coming to an island either. In fact…”)

Mai: “I don’t believe I remember, either. But, it’s not smart to ask questions we can’t answer, Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “Alright. Then what do you s’pose we do, since you seem to be real calm about our situation?”

Mai: “I managed to overcome my initial shock since I woke up much earlier before you two. Now we’re all awake, I propose we all try and remember exactly what we were doing before we all woke up here.”

Hayasaka: (“Before I woke up here… What was I doing? If I recall correctly…”) “Ah, I was, um, at an interview for a job I think–”

Kurumada: “Hey, me too!”

Hayasaka: “W-What?”

Mai: “Oh, me too! What a funny coincidence!”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Kurumada: “Wait, we can’t all have had interviews!”

Mai: “How come you did then?”

Kurumada: “I could ask *you* the same thing, y’know.”

Hayasaka: “Uh, this is just a hunch, but, were you all invited to said interview via letter…?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, I got this weird letter in the mail sayin’ I was accepted into this company thing.”

Hayasaka: “ *What…?* ”

Mai: “So did I. Now, what was the company called again…? Oh! Nesos!”

Hayasaka: “Nesos…!”

Kurumada: “So it’s the same for you, huh? Heh… Wait. What?! Why didn’t ya tell me you two got the same letter!?”

Mai: “Why didn’t *you* ?”

Kurumada: “Hey, don’t bring this back on me!”

Hayasaka: “...Because the letter told us to keep it a secret.”

Mai: “Oh yes! It did, didn’t it? I didn’t tell a soul! Hum… Perhaps that wasn’t the right choice, considering our current situation.”

Kurumada: “I wish I told ya both now. Then we wouldn’t be in such a goddamn commotion. Shit.”

Hayasaka: “No, it’s what the organisation wanted us to do, in order to keep themselves under the radar.”

Kurumada: “Why’re they try’na be so secretive in the first place?”

Mai: “It must have something to do with what they promised us in the letter alongside the rather large salary they said we’d receive if we joined…”

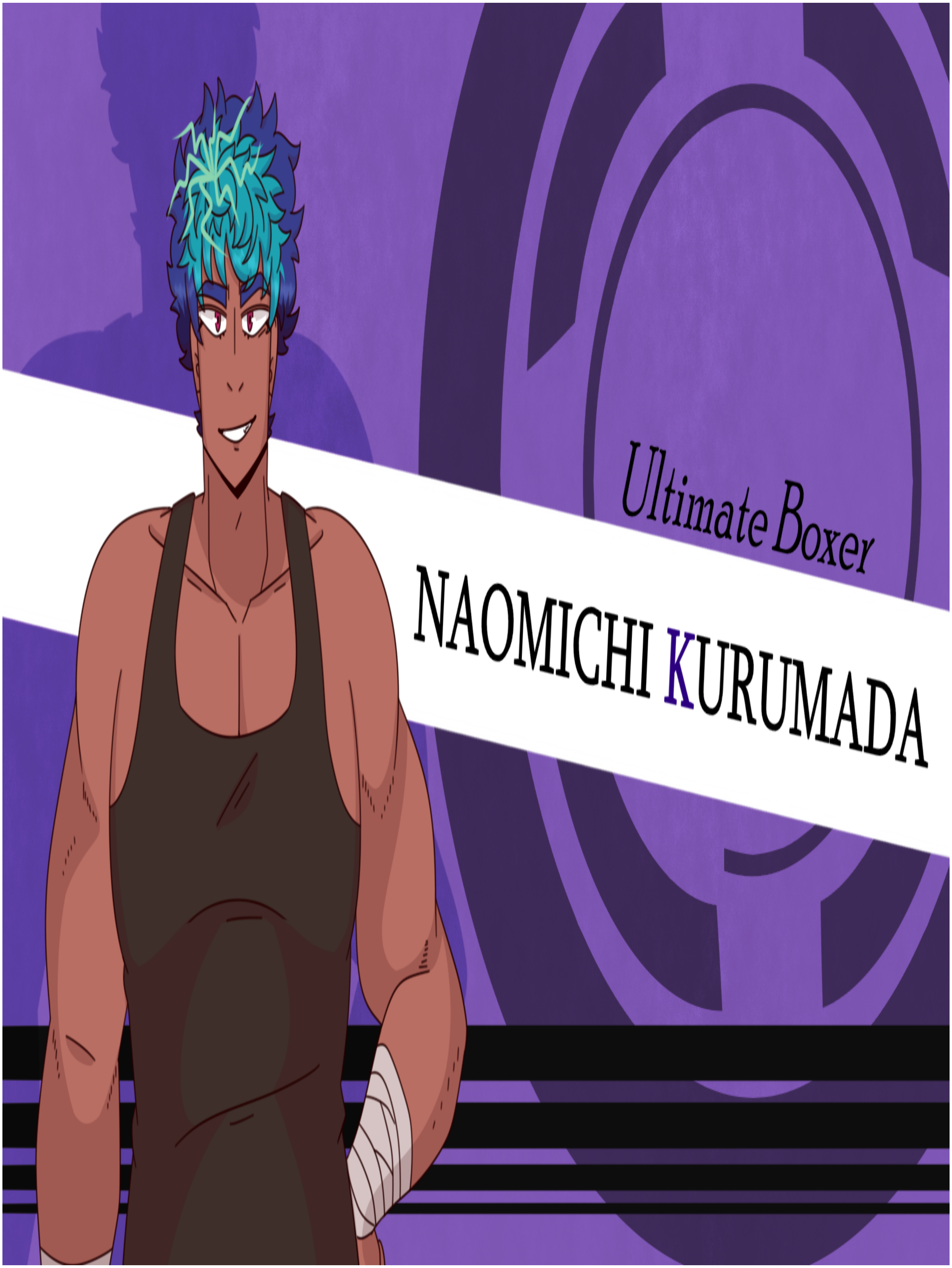
Kurumada: “Dammit. I knew it was too good to be true.”

Hayasaka: (“Too good to be true…? Still, nothing has proved that false so far. But, I’m surprised both of them managed to keep it a secret, as they’re definitely not the quietest people I’ve met, haha…”)

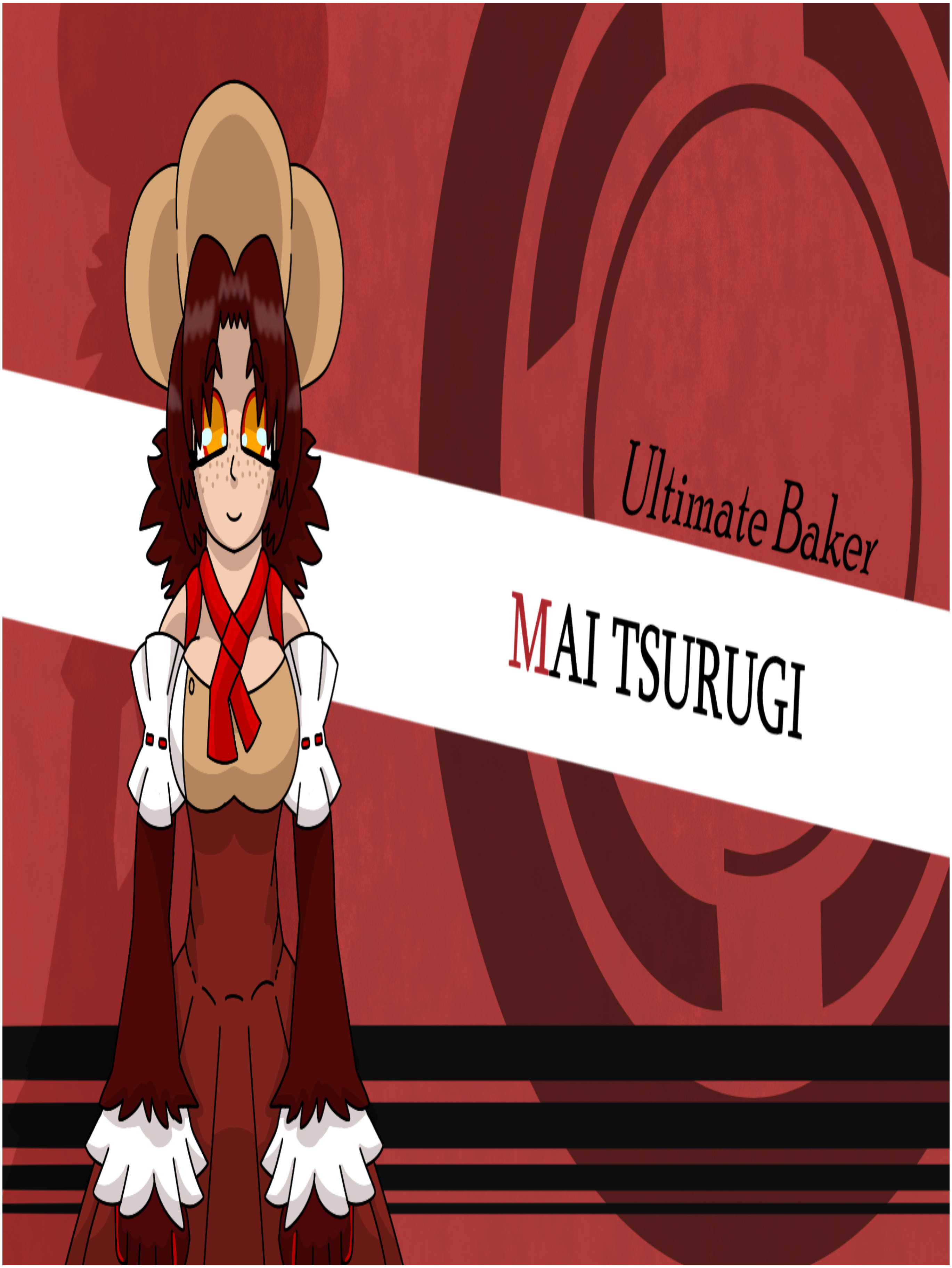
Mai: “Hm, well, don’t act so frowny! Don’t you want to know each other’s Ultimate Talents?”

Hayasaka: “Talents? Ah, you mean the role we were assigned?”

Kurumada: “Heh, well mine’s pretty obvious: Ultimate Boxer. Ultimate has a nice ring to it, ‘course not as great as Convertible of Destruction, but it’ll have to do.”


Ultimate Boxer
NAOMICHI KURUMADA

Mai: “Ultimate Baker is such a cute name! Perhaps I could make business cards for my bakery and add that to my title?”


Ultimate Baker
MAI TSURUGI

Kurumada: “How about you, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “M-Me?”

Mai: “Yes! Oh, I’m so curious about your talent! I’m not actually sure what it could be…”

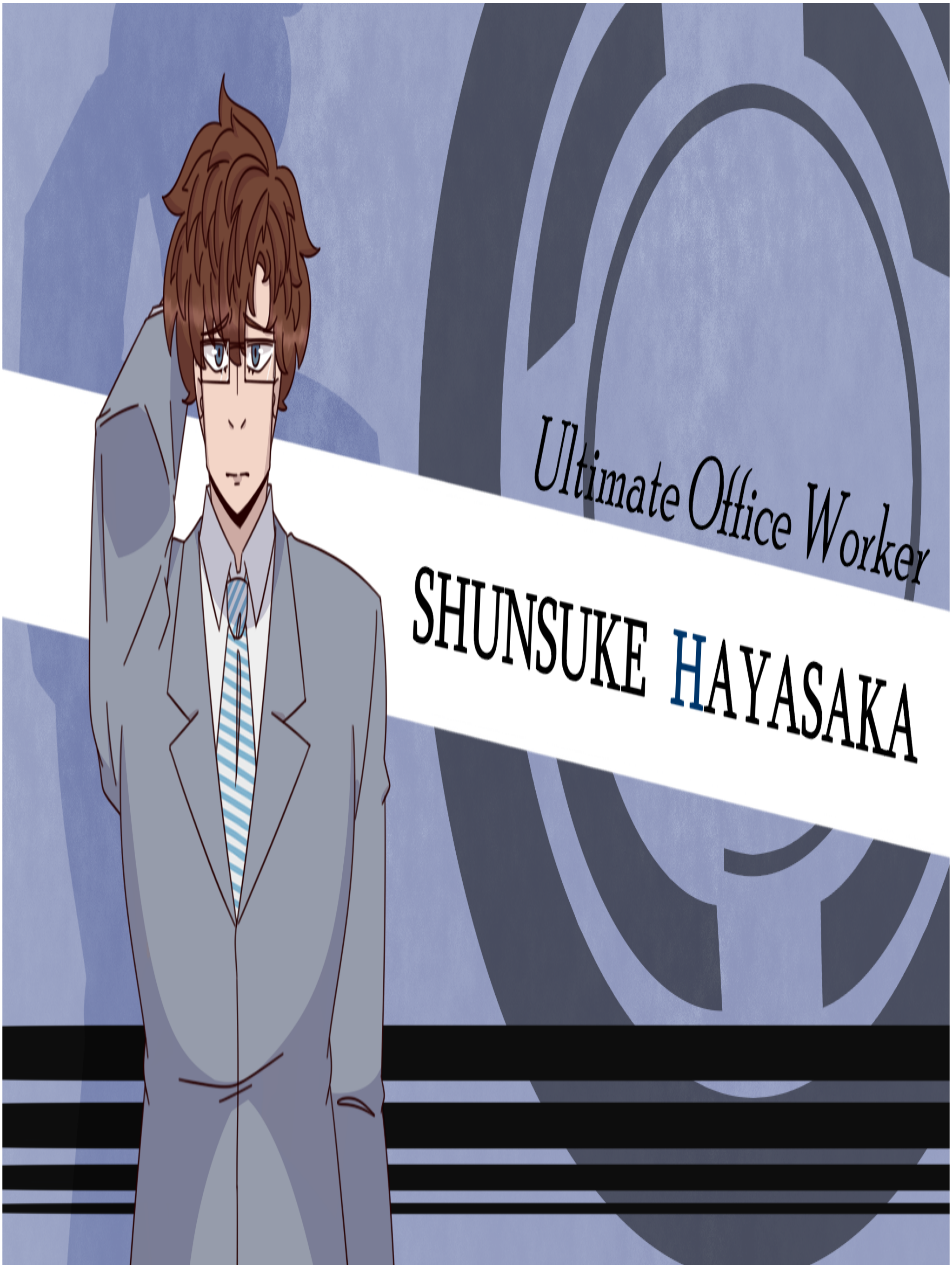
Hayasaka: “My talent… Well, my talent is, um…”

Kurumada: “Ya didn’t forget it, did you?”

Hayasaka: “N-No. It’s just… It’s nowhere as impressive as your titles. Well, that is to be expected, isn’t it? Haha…”

Mai: “Oh? So what is it then?”

Hayasaka: “Ultimate… *sigh* , Office Worker.”


Ultimate Office Worker
SHUNSUKE HAYASAKA

Both Kurumada and Mai remained silent for a moment. Hayasaka curled into himself, arm reaching up behind his neck.

Hayasaka: (“Ah jeeze… did they hear me?”)

Kurumada: “Heh… Bahaha! Ya jokin’! ...Right?”

Hayasaka: “...No.”

Kurumada: “Oh. *Oh* . Um, that’s–uh… Is that even a talent?”

Mai: “Kurumada!”

Mai nudged Kurumada slightly.

Mai: “Hayasaka’s always been good at his job, haven’t you?”

Hayasaka: “It’s fine… I know I have a silly-sounding talent. Maybe we should just ignore it, haha…”

Kurumada: “Nah. I mean, like, companies always need a business man, don’t they?”

Mai: “Perhaps you’ll be a lot of help to them!”

Hayasaka: “Maybe…”

Kurumada: “Anyway, there was no point in doin’ that! That didn’t help us at all!”

Mai: “Well, don’t you feel somewhat calmer?”

Kurumada: “... *No* .”

Mai: “But I do! Hehe.”

Kurumada: “Argh… Can we at least start explorin’ where we are? Find some sort of building or people at least?”

Not waiting for an answer, Kurumada took permission to start wandering around, Hayasaka watching as he turned his head in every direction until he paused at something above him.

Kurumada: “Hey, what the hell is that?”

Mai: “Hm?”

Kurumada: “Up there…”

Kurumada pointed up into one of the many palm trees closeby in the area. Both Mai and Hayasaka followed the direction of his gesture, only to share a similar expression to him as they realised what he had initially discovered.

Hayasaka: “I-Is that a… surveillance camera?”

Mai: “Oh dear… I wonder what that’s doing there in such a strange place.”

Kurumada: “D’ya think it’s watching us? Should I try n’ knock it down?”

Hayasaka: “No–wait, don’t do that…! Perhaps… it’s there to keep us safe? I-I mean, if we *are* meant to be here, then it could be to make sure we aren’t in any danger.”

Mai: “Hm, like if someone were to start drowning in the ocean?”

Hayasaka: “T-That’s quite the example, but yes.”

Kurumada: “...Whatever ya say. But I ain’t so happy with it.”

Hayasaka: (“To be completely honest, I’m not so sure myself. But, it’s a lot more reassuring to believe this doesn’t have bad intentions. Surely it doesn’t in reality…”)

Kurumada: “Still, I don’t get it. What’s the point of takin’ us to an island for this job? It never said any of this in the letter.”

Mai: “Maybe they mentioned it in the interview? However, I don’t seem to recall any of it…”

Hayasaka: “Me neither…”

Mai: “Oh, well let’s not worry too hard about that now! I actually remember something else: while I was waiting for you two to wake up, I saw some people walk by. That must mean there’s others on the island, hm?”

Kurumada: “Really? Thank god. Wait–why didn’t ya mention this in the first place?!”

Mai: “I *was* getting around to it, you know. Anyway, we should go and meet them and see if they know anything about our situation. That seems like the best course of action!”

Kurumada: “Alright, well, only to ask around. I ain’t here to be friendly until we know exactly what’s goin’ on, y’hear?”

Mai: “Whatever you say. I just wonder what types of people we’ll meet. I hope some of them are cute!”

Hayasaka: ("I guess I'm going to be following along, huh? Haha, it's not like I have much of a choice… I suppose it's better walking around an unfamiliar place with people I'm familiar with.")

Trailing close behind, Hayasaka followed Kurumada and Mai off the beach where they quickly found a path and began their search for other people. As he attempted to brush off the few sand grains that had decided to stick to his hands from his awakening at the beach, Hayasaka noticed a large building gradually come into clearing past the exotic flora. When the three had gotten closer, he realised it was a hotel resort, overbearing and luxurious as it towered over them. And it wasn't stand-alone either: another building was situated to it's right, connected with a corridor obviously assumed to be accessed from the inside.

Hayasaka: ("Perhaps a leisure centre…?")

Kurumada: "What the hell is this?"

Mai: "It looks like a hotel. Oh, and such a lovely one at that!"

Mai clasped her hands together, her gloves forming a rather muted sound like falling onto soft snow.

Mai: "I wonder if this is where we'll be staying while we work… Let's hope our rooms are next to each other, hm?"

Hayasaka: "I feel like that's the least of our concerns right now…"

Regardless of Hayasaka's worries, Mai wandered towards the hotel's entrance, forcing him and Kurumada to tag along. Once inside, they were firstly greeted by the hotel's lobby which contained quite an open airy space with the sweet smell of fruits wafting about inside. But, what caught Hayasaka's attention more than anything else was the appearance of two figures standing around.

Hayasaka: ("Ah, people…! So, we really aren't alone. That's a relief, haha… Wait. I-Is that a…?")

Kurumada: “ *Don’t tell me I’m the only one who’s seein’ an animal standin’ on two legs right now…* ”

Hayasaka: “ *W-Wearing a work uniform, even…* ”

Mai: “Aw, how adorable! Is that a fox?”

Completely ignorant to Hayasaka and Kurumada’s utter confusion, Mai sauntered over to said animal, who was struggling to look over the reception desk due to their short stature.

Mai: “Hello~! And who might you be, little fox?”

???: “E-Eh?! Oh, um, hello!”

Slightly startled at first, the animal jumped around and dived straight into a formal bow. Hayasaka blinked, almost believing he was looking in a mirror of sorts.

???: “Oh, but, um, I’m not a fox. A red panda, actually.”

Mai: “Huh? Sorry for that! I couldn’t tell just by looking from behind.”

Kurumada: “ *And it speaks* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah dear…”

Mai: “I’m Mai, the Ultimate Baker, and these two behind me are my friends: Kurumada and Hayasaka. Say hello, won’t you? It’s rude to stare at a lady.”

Kurumada: “A lady…? Whatever. Hey, I guess.”

Hayasaka: “Um, hello. Do you have a name…?”

???: “Of course I do! I’m Retsuko, assigned as the Ultimate Heavy Metal Vocalist.”

Ultimate Heavy Metal Vocalist
RETSUKO

Hayasaka: (“Retsuko…? So, she’s Japanese?”)

Mai: “Heavy metal? But someone as small as you…”

Retsuko: “Ah, y-you see… Maybe we should just ignore that. If anything, my accounting skills should’ve been more useful here. Ah well…”

Kurumada lightly nudged Hayasaka on the shoulder with a minor smirk on his face.

Kurumada: “Heh, the red panda gets a more interestin’ talent than you, eh?”

Hayasaka: “ *sigh* … Uh, so Retsuko, do you happen to know where we are?”

Retsuko: “Oh? Well, I don’t know, actually. I’ve been stuck here trying to get the attention from a receptionist in the back, but they probably can’t see me. However, the bell doesn’t seem to do anything, either.”

Mai: “Hmph. Such tardy staff. Are we not to be prioritised on our first day of work?”

Kurumada: “Don’t get ya hopes up. Haven’t seen a single worker around ever since we came in here.”

Hayasaka: (“Not a single sign of any staff? That’s a little…”)

Retsuko: “I’ll keep trying. I don’t really want to go anywhere else, especially if we all need to be booked in first.”

Hayasaka: “Thank you for your efforts.”

Mai: “I hope we can speak later!”

Retsuko turned back to the desk, ringing the bell again and waiting for a response.

Kurumada: “Okay, so uh, how’d ya talk to it so easily?”

Mai: “She’s not an ‘it’, she’s a ‘her’. And, I’m simply trying to be polite. Does she even appear a threat to you?”

Kurumada: “Guess not.”

Mai: “See? Well then, let’s keep meeting people then!”

Mai was then quick to walk over to the other person, wasting no time in beckoning the other’s to follow. This time it *was* a human, a highschool boy to be exact, eyes behind thin lenses intently studying a pamphlet from a nearby display.

Mai: “He looks kind of similar to your style, Hayasaka. Why don’t you say hello first?”

Hayasaka: “M-Me?” (“Well, I suppose I don’t have much of a choice. Their scarf is rather interesting, to say the least…”)

Hayasaka cleared his throat, causing the boy to peer up at him, face remaining as straight-faced as it were before.

Hayasaka: “Ah, hello there. I’m Hayasaka–”

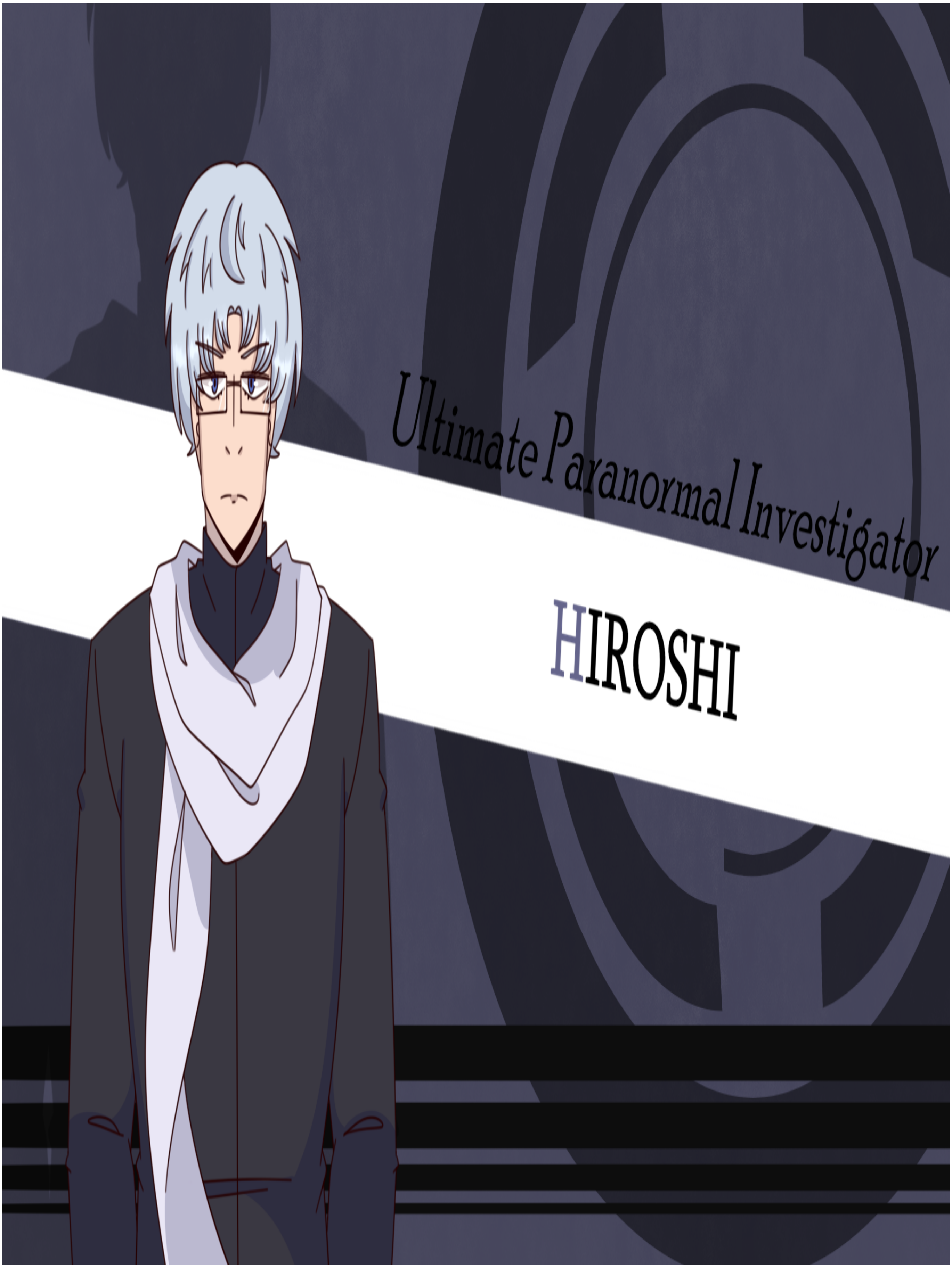
Mai: “Mai, Ultimate Baker!”

Hayasaka: “–Ultimate Office Worker, um, and…”

Kurumada: “Kurumada, boxer.”

Hayasaka: “...A-And you?”

???: “Hiroshi. Ultimate Paranormal Investigator.”


Ultimate Paranormal Investigator
HIROSHI

Kurumada: “Paranormal what? You like one of those guys who check out supposedly haunted buildings?”

Hiroshi: “No, I investigate scientifically viable sources of paranormalcy.”

Mai: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: (“Quite the intelligent mouth on him.”)

Kurumada: “At your age?”

Hiroshi: “I understand how confusing this may look to adults such as yourself. I’ll explain it briefly: there is this creature known as the Ao Oni who lives in an abandoned mansion on the outskirts of our village. I have been studying it ever since my encounter with it alongside a few of my friends.”

Hayasaka: (“Ao Oni… Blue demon? That can’t be real, can it?”)

Kurumada: “Likely story.”

Hiroshi: “I too would believe the same. However, I assure you that this creature is very much real and many of its mysteries have been solved by myself over many daring trips to its place of residence.”

Mai: “Even so, it must be lonely to accept such a big request to join this company by yourself. Unless your friends are around?”

Hiroshi: “No, I’m here alone. But, this is what I chose to do. I hoped that this would help further my understanding of the Oni and to capture it once and for all. However, despite this, I don’t seem to have any recollection of how I got here in the first place.”

Hayasaka: “You’re not alone on that one, haha…”

Mai: “Is it reassuring that the adults don’t know either?”

Hiroshi: “No. It seems a bit concerning.”

Mai: “Oh.”

Hiroshi: “Though, I plan to keep an eye out for any clues.”

Hayasaka: “Then we’ll make sure to do the same. Right, Kurumada?”

Turning to Kurumada, Hayasaka titled his head in confusion only to see him aimlessly flicking through a copy of the pamphlet Hiroshi had originally been reading.

Mai: “Kurumada! Don’t act so bored. We’re here to meet and learn about the others.”

Kurumada: “Hey, hey, I wasn’t *bored* . I was just curious what was inside here. S’just useless shit, anyway.”

Kurumada then promptly tossed the pamphlet back into the display.

Mai: “Right, let’s say we move on? How about in there?”

Mai pointed towards a double door. As the three walked inside, Hayasaka saw that it was in fact a restaurant. A large one at that: tables packed everywhere as well as a bar at the side. With only the three people he noticed loitering inside, it seemed so isolated from it’s actual purpose to host multitudes of guests.

???: “Hey, more people!”

A voice abruptly halted the three's initial ideas to start wondering who to talk to first, as a young man in a beanie and yellow hoodie from the other side of the restaurant called out to them.

???: "Over here, yo!"

???: "Jesse!"

An older man in a hat and glasses standing beside him sighed as the three walked over.

Mai: "Hello there! I'm Mai, and this is Kurumada and Hayasaka."

???: "Heheh, you guys look kinda funky. What the hell are you even wearing?"

Kurumada: "Excuse you, wet floor sign."

???: "Says the dude decked in traffic cone pants."

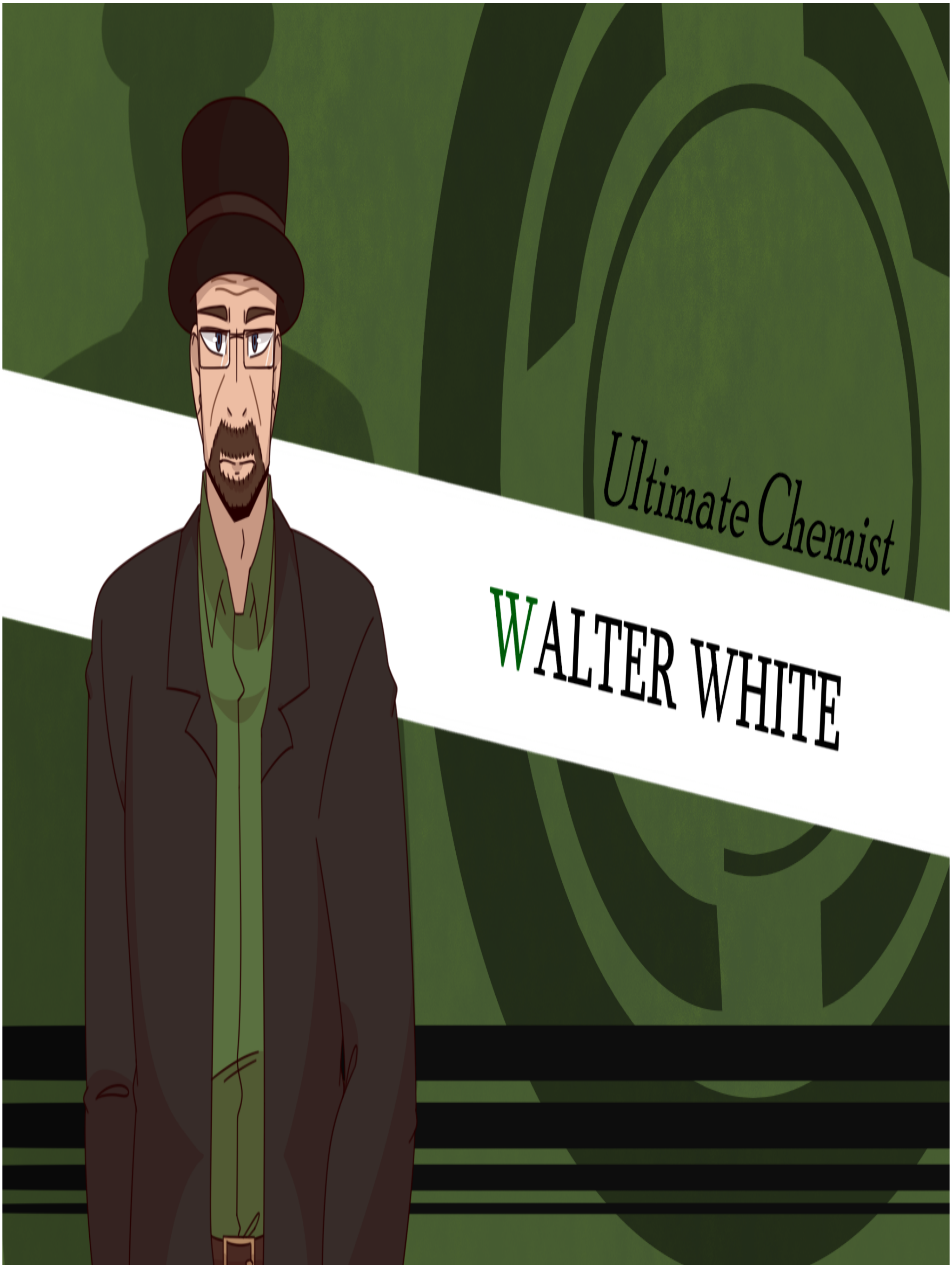
Kurumada: " *Asshole* ."

Hayasaka: "Ah, um, t-that's enough of that now."

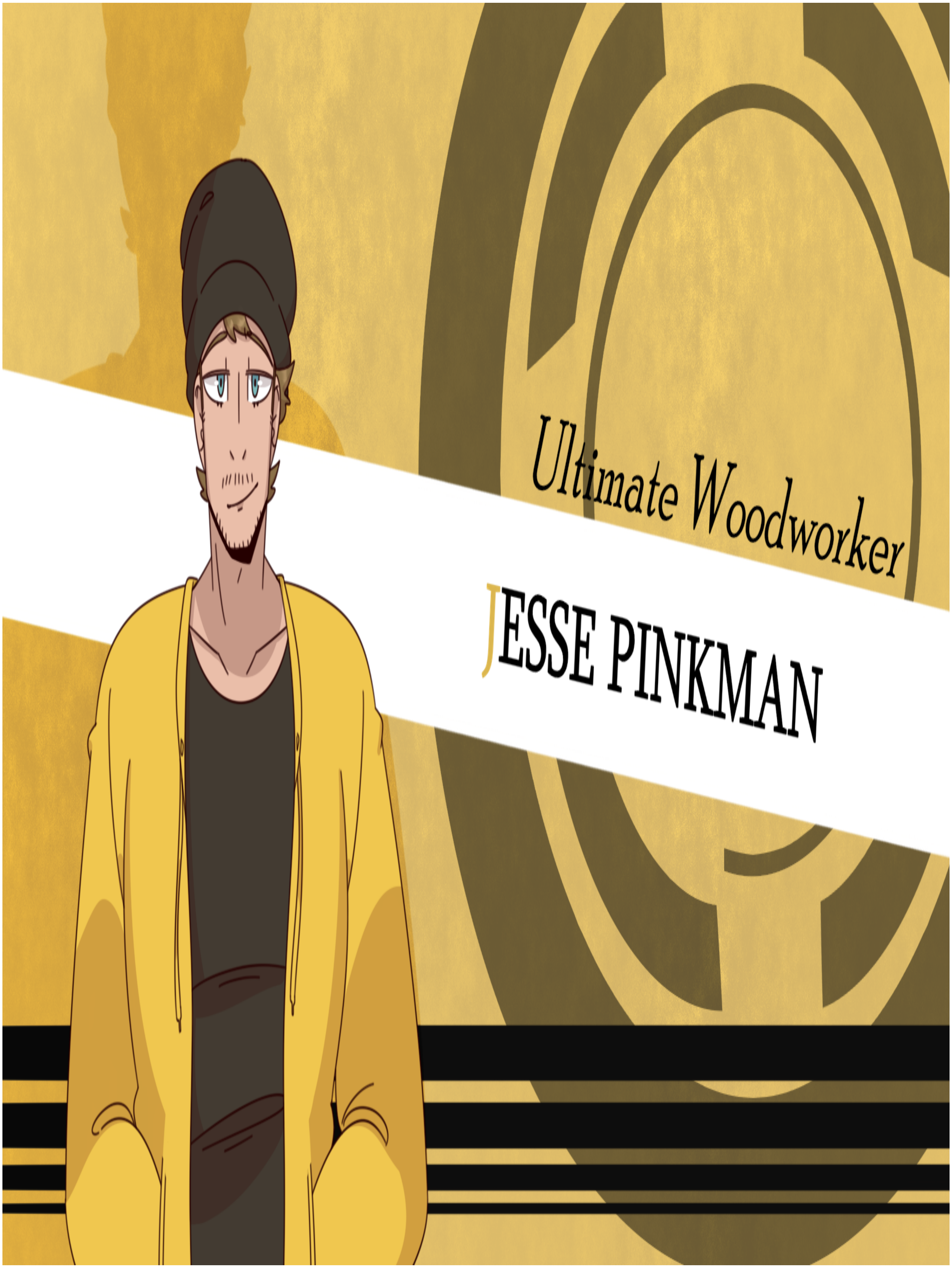
???: "Yes, I too apologise for my… *acquaintance* deciding to be an impulsive idiot as per usual."

???: "Suck some, dude."

???: "For god's sake, Jesse. Argh, nevermind. Now that you're here, I might as well introduce myself. I'm Walter White, and as far as I'm concerned that you three are also new employees of this company, I'll also let you know that I'm the Ultimate Chemist."


Ultimate Chemist
WALTER WHITE

???: “Yeah, and I’m Jesse Pinkman, Ultimate Woodworker, *bi-atch* !”


Ultimate Woodworker
JESSE PINKMAN

Hayasaka: (“Interesting talents…”) “So, uh, how do you two know each other, if I’m alright to ask that?”

Jesse: “You’re totally cool too, yo. I’m Mr. White’s old student. He still teaches chemistry at the same damn school, y’know.”

Walter: “Well done, Jesse. You realise people don’t change career paths all that often. Well of course you wouldn’t know that, being the NEET that you are.”

Jesse: “Not since I got this gig now. And I mean, from when we were also cooking–”

Walter: “ *Jesse* !”

Mai: “Cooking?”

Walter: “You see, ah, Jesse and I, we’re… *business partners* . We actually accepted this company’s offer to further said business. At least we did, but now there’s no telling what they intend of us.”

Hayasaka: “W-What do you mean?”

Walter: “I’m suspicious of our whereabouts. It was never specified in the letter that we’d be working on an island.”

Kurumada: “Hey, that’s what I thought too.”

Jesse: “Man, I dunno why you’re being so paranoid, Mr. White. Just chill out for once.”

Mai: “Mhm, I agree! You hardly ever get the time to go on vacation these days, hm?”

Jesse: “Yeah, this chick’s got the right idea.”

Mai: “ *Mai* , not *this chick* .”

Jesse: “Uh, sorry, yo.”

Hayasaka: (“...No, I agree with Walter. I just can’t relax here, not with so many unanswered questions hanging in the air. I wonder if I should ask him about what he thinks is going on…”)

Walter: “Alright, well, if we’re done here, let’s go Jesse. We still have places to look around.”

Jesse: “Already? Fine. Cya ‘round, I guess.”

Hayasaka: “Oh, goodbye…”

Hayasaka watched as Walter walked off with Jesse in tow, shoving his hands into his hoodie’s pockets and dragging his sneakers across the ceramic tiles.

Hayasaka: (“A rather odd duo to say the least…”)

Mai: “Hm… Oh! Look over there, guys.”

Kurumada: “Oh great, another *animal* .”

Mai: “Let’s go say hello!”

Mai then led them over to someone sitting at the bar, Hayasaka hiding his double take over the supposed *horse* swirling a beer bottle around in his hand.

Mai: “Hello, Mr. Horse! What’re you doing over here by yourself, hm?”

???: “Huh? Ugh, alright, if you’re here just to call me out as the horse from Horsin’ Around, you can leave. You think celebrities like you calling them out in the middle of the street? I mean, sure, it sounds great, but imagine just trying to get some milk or something for god’s sake.”

Hayasaka: (“Well that’s quite the introduction…”)

Kurumada: “Eh? The hell’s “Horsin’ Around”?”

???: “What?!”

Suddenly the horse slammed his drink onto the bar table and stared at the three in disbelief, despite his eyes remaining heavy from his slightly intoxicated state.

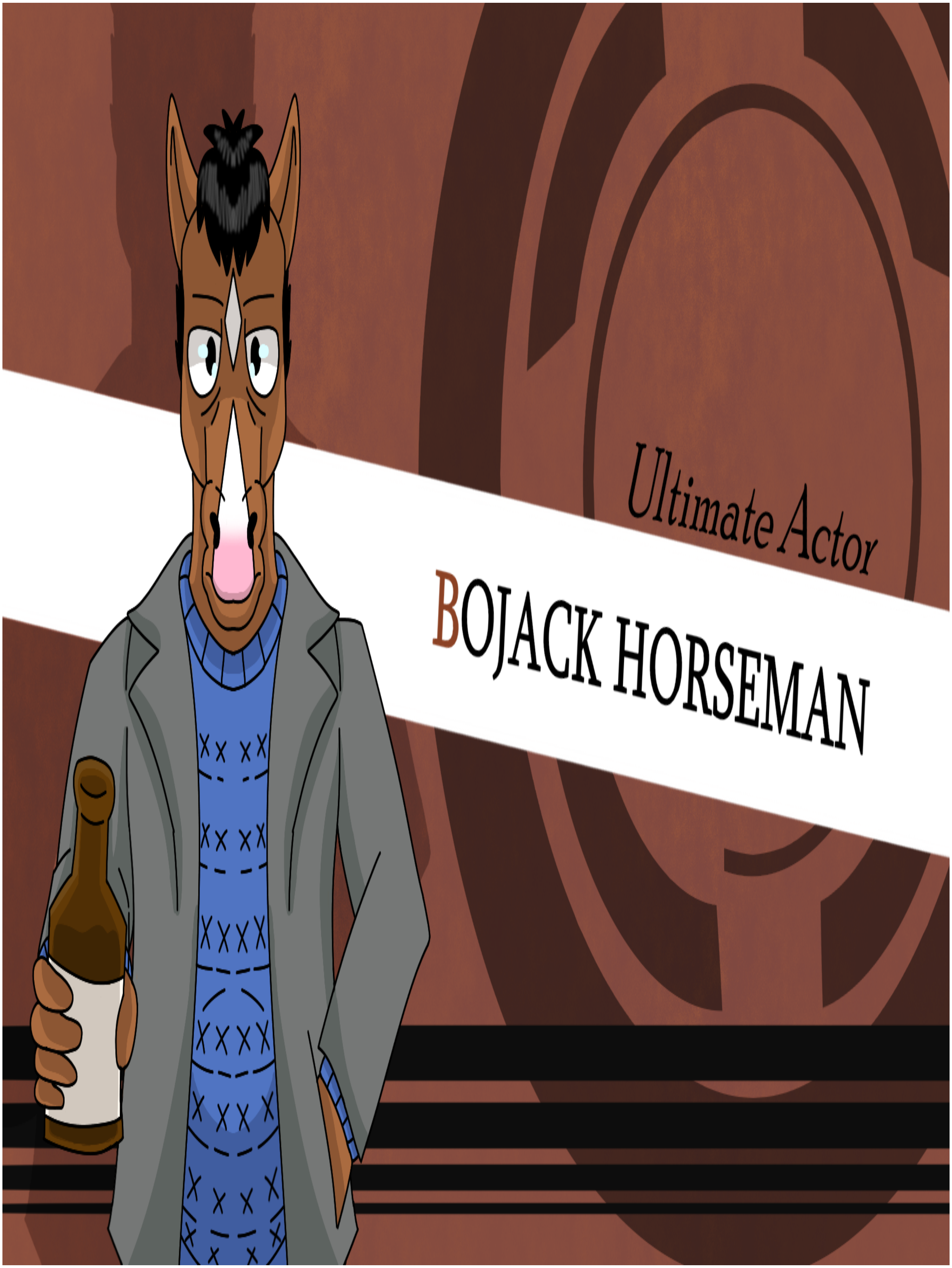
???: “You’re telling me you don’t know what Horsin’ Around is? At all? Not in a magazine at least?”

The three shook their heads. The horse stared at them for only a moment longer, and then sighed as he slumped back into his stool.

???: “Must be foreigners…”

Mai: “...Let’s put that aside for now. I’m Mai, and this is Kurumada and Hayasaka.”

???: “Oh, you want me to do one of those introductions? Well I’m Bojack. Bojack Horseman. The actor. Bojack Horseman, the actor. Ultimate Actor, according to this place. Ringing any bells? Anyway, for your information, I starred in Horsin’ Around in the 90s.”


Ultimate Actor
BOJACK HORSEMAN

Hayasaka: “So what do you do now?”

Bojack: “Now? Well, uh, let’s see here… Living in Hollywoo, got a book published, uh, this and that… starred as my childhood hero in a movie, uh… Oh yeah. Filming the first season of a show. That I’m also starring in.”

Mai: “Oh, how impressive! So you’re still relevant then?”

Bojack: “Relevant? Uh, sure, I guess…”

Kurumada: “So why’re ya here and not wherever the hell filmin’?”

Bojack: “I got a letter in the mail inviting me to come here. Almost threw it out at first with all the other junk mail I get. And that newspaper I can’t seem to unsubscribe from. Anyway that’s not important to you. And I just thought: why not? I figured it’d be a break from the tense air that was going around the set. I also just enjoy the promise of free drinks.”

Ending on that note, Bojack took another swig from his bottle.

Bojack: “Not to say I’m easily swayed. As I’m not. I was just thirsty right now.”

Kurumada: “You should ‘prolly stop that daytime drinkin’. It ain’t doin’ ya health any favours.”

Bojack: “I don’t remember asking for a second opinion.”

Kurumada: “The hell’s your problem?”

Mai: “Right! Well, I’m assuming you’re not so sure how you got here either, right?”

Bojack: “How I got here? Now that you mention it… I thought I just blacked out and couldn’t remember. It usually happens. I mean not a lot. But sometimes.”

Hayasaka: (“Was that why he seemed so calm all this time?”)

Mai: “Hm, okay then. We’ll let you get back to your… drinking, then. Goodbye!”

Mai gently but firmly pushed the two off back to the hotel lobby, Hayasaka watching as Kurumada turned his head to give one last dirty look at Bojack.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…”

Kurumada: “...What do ya think of the people here so far?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? W-Well… it’s hard to say. If anything, I wasn’t prepared to see these types of people hired onto the company alongside me, haha…” (“Even seeing Kurumada and Mai be accepted is strange too, in all honesty… From my letter alone, I assumed this was an office firm. But, now seeing these people, I’m not too certain what this is anymore…”)

Kurumada: “Yeah, it’s damn weird. I’m not gonna go around trustin’ any of ‘em yet. ‘Course, I am happy to have you and Mai to rely on.”

Mai: “Tsk, tsk, Kurumada. Everyone else is just as suspicious of you as you are of them in reality. Don’t think you’re the only one with these thoughts.”

Kurumada: “Ugh… So what? Finally admittin’ that you bein’ all nice to people is an act?”

Mai: “Of course not. Being polite always comes first.”

Kurumada: “I’m sure that’s what ya think…”

Hayasaka: "..."

Mai: "Oh, look over there. Perhaps that will get you to stop acting so negative."

Mai gestured towards another doorway that led down a corridor. Connecting the dots from what he knew of the exterior of the hotel, Hayasaka realised that this was the corridor leading to the connected building. It turned out he wasn't far off in his initial suspicions, as one quick look at the sign beside the doorway let them know it led to a *'Sports Centre'*. Kurumada perked up slightly, but continued to double down and shake his head.

Kurumada: "Let's go an' check it out, at least."

Entering the sports centre, the forefront room appeared to be a tennis court. Hayasaka noticed a map displayed on the wall beside him, and turned to take a look.

Hayasaka: "Ah, there also seems to be a gym and pool further into the centre. I'm sure you're happy to hear that, huh Kurumada? Haha…"

Kurumada: "Yeah, sure."

Hayasaka: ("...That was an awkward attempt. Jeeze. But, I can't blame him. Even if *I* found something I liked here, I wouldn't be very excited about it right now…")

Mai: "Aw, aren't you two such cute boys!"

???: "H-Hey! Get off me!"

Both Hayasaka and Kurumada turned to see Mai on the other side of the court gushing over a highschool boy with fluffy light-blue hair, who in turn was trying to fight her off from squishing his cheek. They rushed over just as Mai finally gave up trying to coddle him.

Mai: "Hehe, I'm sorry. I couldn't resist – your skin is just so smooth and soft!"

???: “E-Eh, erm, thanks… I-I mean, I’m not soft! You could’ve been seriously hurt if you hadn’t given up just then! My powers are too reckless for newcomers like yourself…!”

Mai: “Hm? What’re you talking about?”

The boy composed himself, and snickered into his hand, which was wrapped in a multitude of red bandages.

???: “Hehehe… Now we’re getting somewhere. I suppose I should introduce myself to you mortals. I am Shun Kaidou, the Ultimate Warrior: Judgement Knights of Thunder!”

Hayasaka: “The… what?”

Kaidou: “Ha. You see, trapped inside my arm holds a dangerous power known as the Black Beat, and it must be sealed at all times lest you are unfortunate enough to witness the true power of the Jet Black Wings. But be not afraid, I target my vengeance towards only the true evil of this world: Dark Reunion!”

Kaidou raised his fist dramatically in front of him, only causing Kurumada to raise a brow.

Kurumada: “What the hell are you goin’ on about? You’re not serious, are ya?”

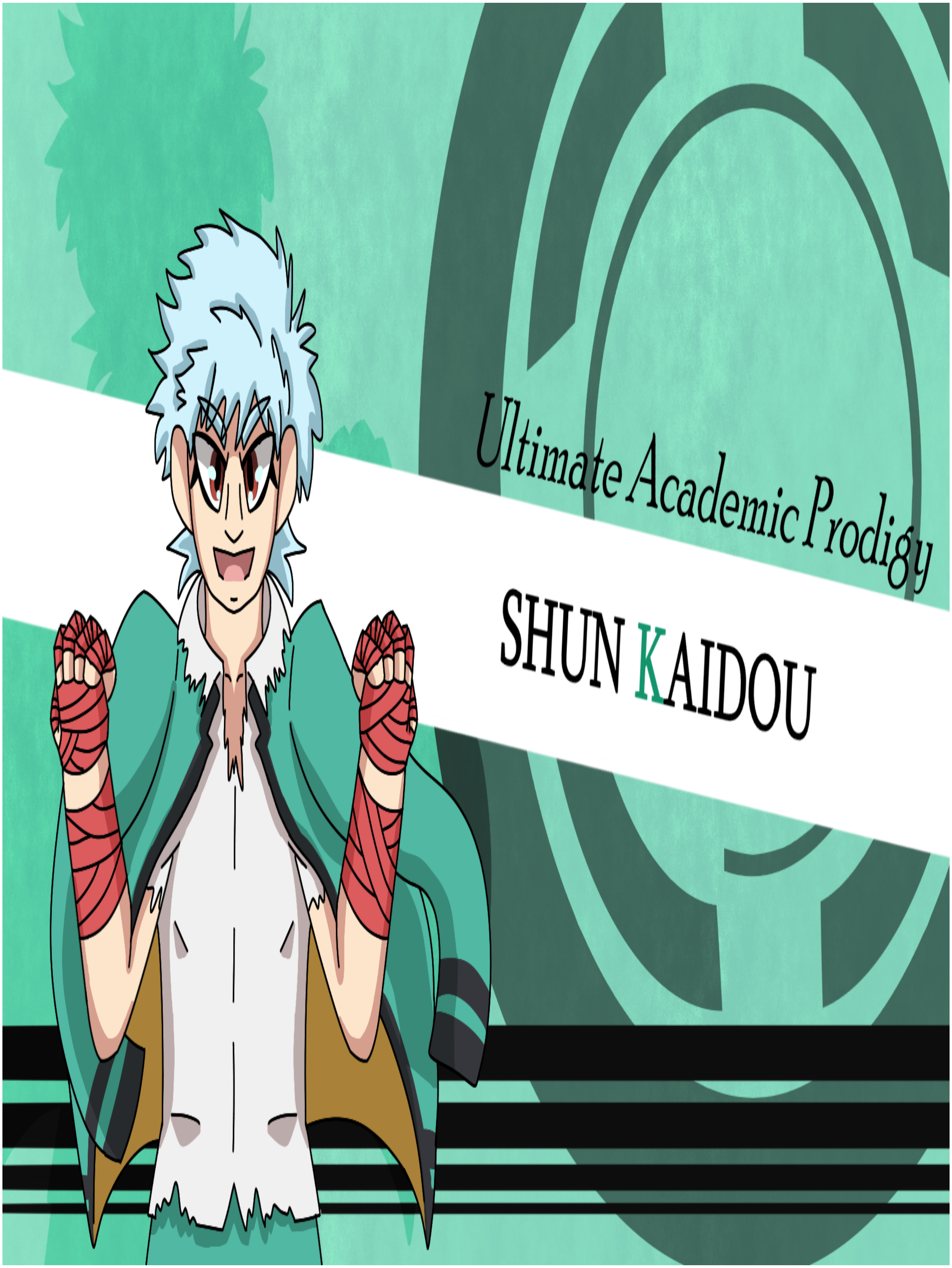
???: “ *He’s not.* ”

Hayasaka: “ *Huh* ?”

Hayasaka turned to see another boy standing beside Kaidou in the same school uniform, wearing tinted glasses and odd pins in his pink hair. Hayasaka blinked in uncertaintainty over if he had always been there to begin with.

???: “ *Kaidou’s actually the Ultimate Academic Prodigy. You should ignore whatever he says about the ‘Jet Black Wings’ for your own convenience.* ”

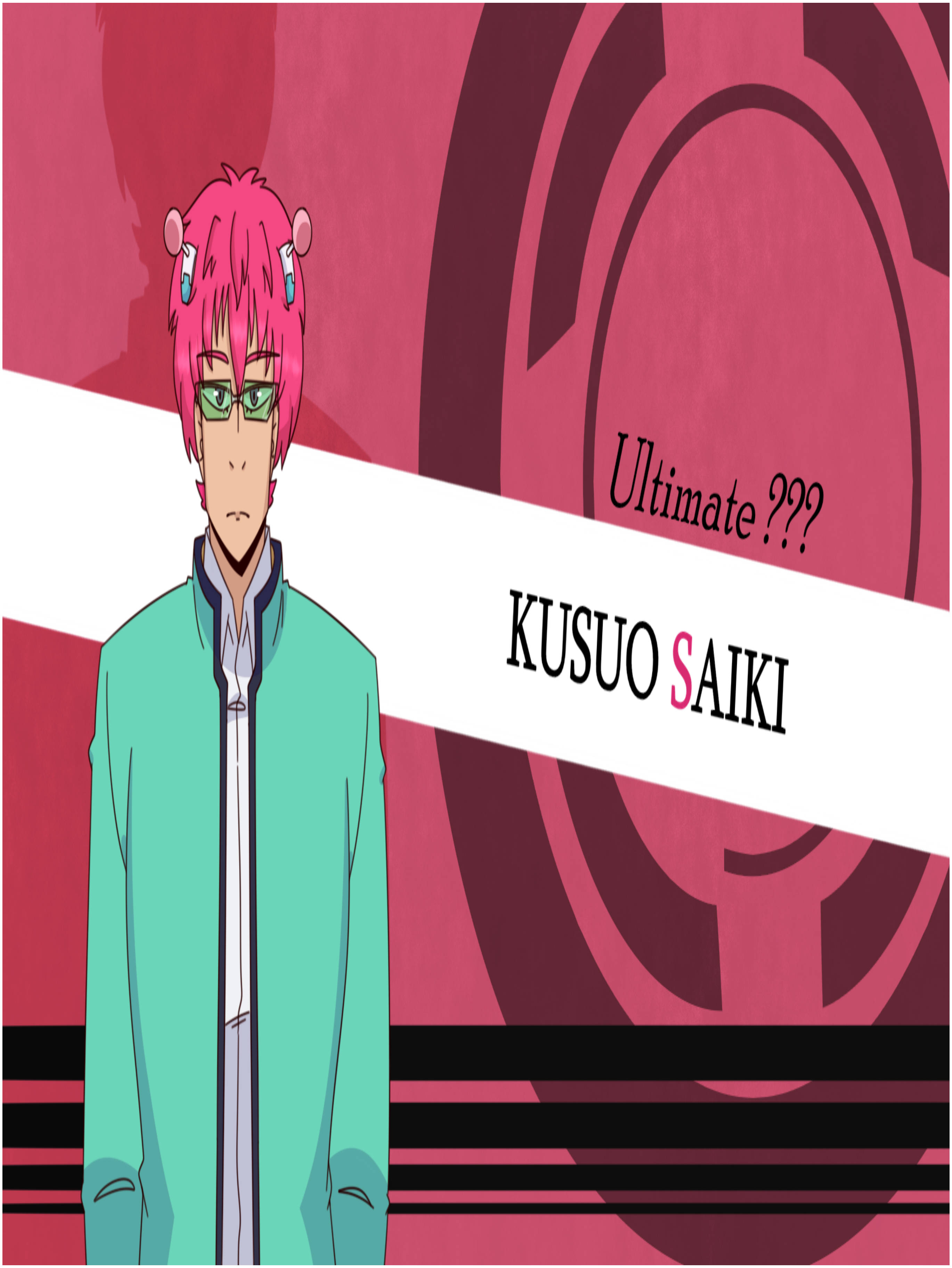
Kaidou: “Saiki! What’re you doing?! You’re ruining my first impression with them!!”


Ultimate Academic Prodigy
SHUN KAIDOU

Despite Kaidou’s whines, the other boy simply shrugged.

Hayasaka: “And who are you then?”

???: “ *Kusuo Saiki.* ”


Ultimate ???
KUSUO SAIKI

Mai: “Hello, Saiki! I’m Mai, and this is Kurumada and Hayasaka. Oh, what about your talent?”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “Erm, Saiki apparently doesn’t seem to remember his talent right now. But that’s OK! We’re gonna figure it out as soon as he does!”

Kurumada: “Right… Well, do any of ya know anything about this island we’re on?”

Kaidou: “No, not really. Me and Saiki both got letters accepting us into this unfamiliar organisation. Appearing neither friend nor foe to Dark Reunion initially, I was skeptical to join… However both our parents kinda made us go for the work experience.”

Saiki made no effort to correct him this time, Hayasaka assuming that was the furthest of their information.

Mai: “I see… Thank you for sharing! I hope to see you cuties around then, hehe.”

Kaidou: “H-Hey, knock it off with the ‘cute’ stuff!”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Saiki is rather… quiet. Call me crazy, but I haven’t caught his mouth move either. M-Maybe I’m just not paying much attention…”)

Hayasaka, upon realising that his friends had begun to approach a different person, quickly sped-walked to catch up with them. When he had gotten closer, he realised this person was crouched against the corner of the court, back hunched over as he twirled a tennis racket around in his hand. He slowly peered up through his messy black hair upon sensing their approach.

Kurumada: “Hey, what’re you doing?”

???: “Does this place seem suspicious to you?”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, I’ve been rather cautious of the lack of staff around. I thought we would’ve at least run into someone who works here by now.”

???: “Yes, I’m glad I’m not the only one who’s noticed. And alongside the fact that we’ve all seemed to have woken up in random locations with no real collective memory on how we ended up here…”

Mai: “Oh, so you’ve noticed it all too…”

???: “Why, of course I have. The moment I awoke I realised something was off, and quickly connected the pieces before talking to a single person.”

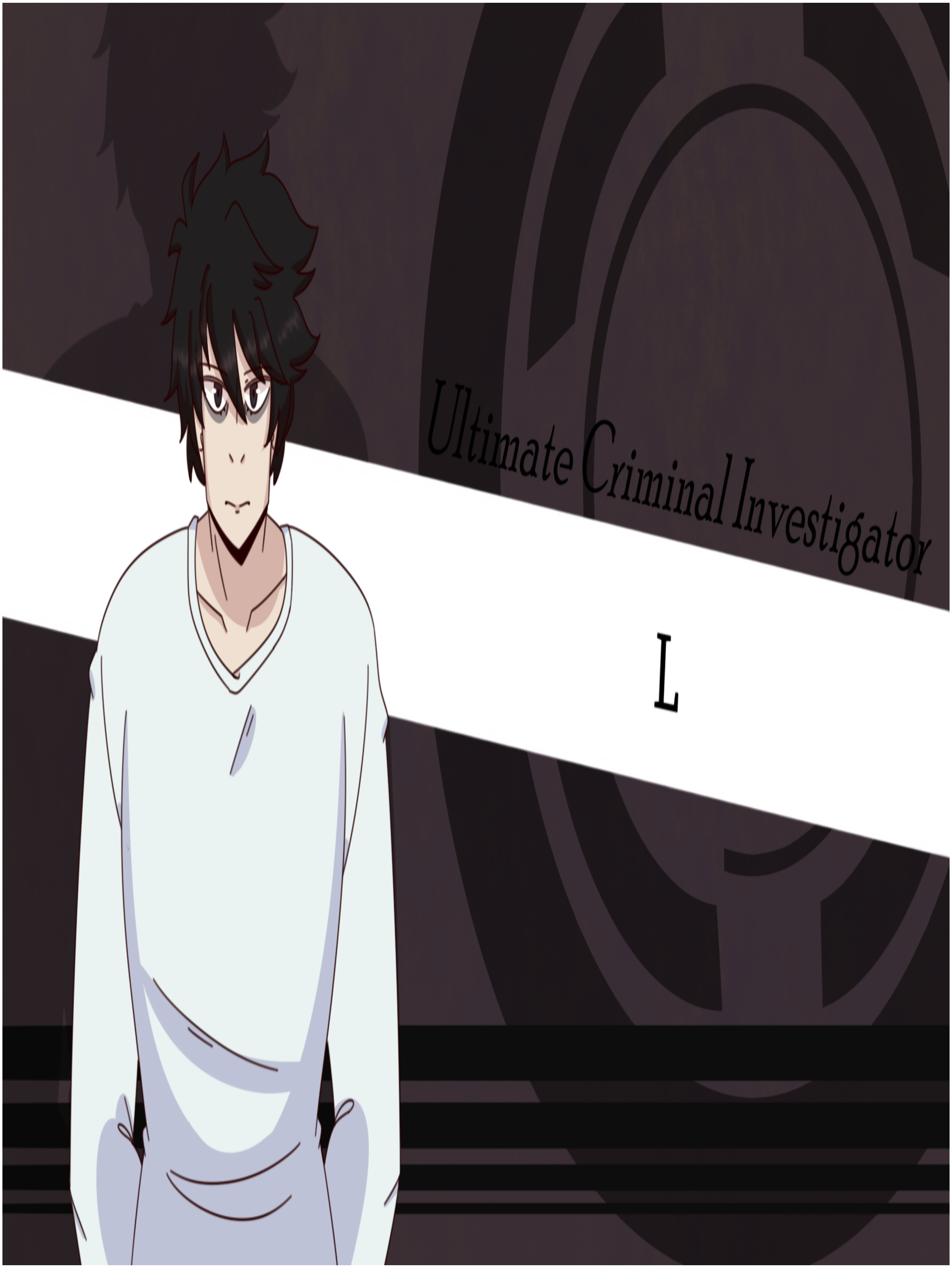
Kurumada: “How the hell d’ya even do that?”

???: “Isn’t it obvious?”

Kurumada: “What…? Argh, whatever–Are ya gonna sit there the whole time or are ya finally gonna stand up and introduce yourself?”

After a few beats, the man gradually heaved himself off the ground, however remained heavily slouched even when standing up.

???: “L, the Ultimate Criminal Investigator.”


Ultimate Criminal Investigator
L

Hayasaka: “Investigator, huh…?”

L: “I’m one of the world’s best, in fact. No meaning to boast, however.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Well if you’re so good, then why haven’t we heard of ya?”

Hayasaka: “Maybe it’s smarter that his identity is kept secret, being a detective and all. In fact, I don’t believe L is his real name either. No offence, haha…”

L: “You’re a bright one. That’s somewhat refreshing to see…”

Kurumada: “ *Excuse me* ?”

Mai: “Well I’m Mai, and here is Hayasaka and Kurumada. May I ask what you’re doing here in the first place if you’re so suspicious of it all?”

L: “Before I awoke here, I was currently in the middle of a thorough investigation into a case regarding a series of murders conducted by the serial killer dubbed as Kira.”

Kurumada: “What? That didn’t answer the question at all!”

L: “...My advice is that you keep an eye out on this island, and the people you meet. I believe this place isn’t as safe and luxurious as it makes itself out to be.”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

L: “Ah, well, if you could excuse me, I don’t have much need to stand around and chat. I have other places I wish to explore for now.”

And with that, L trudged off, leaving the three standing there, equally confused with his previous responses.

Kurumada: "...Damn creepy bastard."

Mai: "You shouldn't be so quick to judge others, you know. I'm sure a lot of people will see *you* as a 'frightening brute' at first glance."

Kurumada: "What did you just call me…?!"

Mai: "Come on, now. We should keep looking around. Isn't that what you wanted to do?"

Hayasaka: ("I'm still concerned over what L said. If a detective thinks that something is wrong, then I don't know if I can trust my initial instinct anymore…")

Walking back to the hotel lobby once again, the three noticed both an elevator and a staircase leading up to what looked to be another floor. Unfortunately, as they tried to access both, they discovered that the elevator was unresponsive, and the door to the stairwell was locked.

Kurumada: "No finding out what's up there, then."

Mai: "For now, at least. Oh well, not to worry! Let's look outside the hotel for now."

With both Kurumada and Mai in the lead, Hayasaka followed them outside the hotel and back onto the path, choosing the opposite direction from where they came from the beach. Not long later, another building was soon spotted: a supermarket this time. The exterior tones were tropical, and the inside was just as cool as any other air-conditioned store. They decided to stick together while exploring the aisles, soon finding themselves strolling past shelves of coffee powders.

Hayasaka: ("So far, it's been relatively normal, par the swimming gear and exotic food displays… Just like any supermarket you'd probably see while on vacation somewhere humid.")

Suddenly, they bumped into another person: a woman in a rather lavish dress and witch-like hat, holding a large spoon in her hand.

???: “Oof!”

Kurumada: “Oi!”

???: “Ah, sorry! I wasn’t looking where I was going…”

Mai: “Oh no, that’s okay! Oh my… Your outfit is so adorable!”

???: “Aw, thank you, hehe. Yours is very lovely as well.”

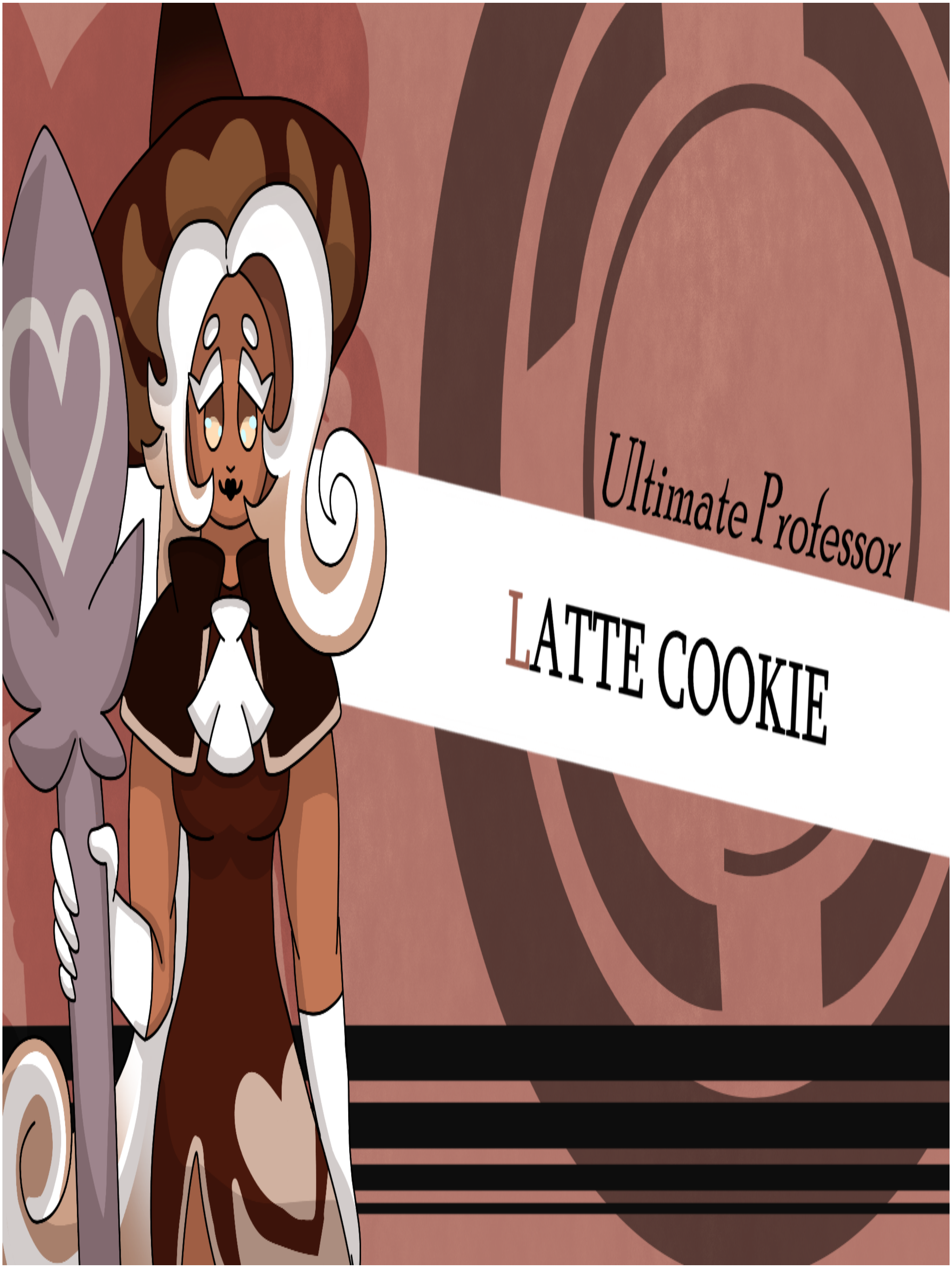
Kurumada: “Tch…”

Mai: “Is something wrong, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “I thought we were s’posed to be lookin’ around, not complimentin’ strangers.”

Mai: “We *are* , but that includes people as well. Speaking of which, I’m Mai, and this is Hayasaka and Kurumada. What’s your name?”

???: “I’m Latte Cookie, but you can just call me Latte. I’m the Ultimate Professor. It’s nice to meet you!”


Ultimate Professor
LATTE COOKIE

Hayasaka: (“A professor? That’s a nice talent.”) “Can I ask what you teach?”

Latte: “I teach coffee magic at the Parfaedia Magic Institute. Well, more specifically glyphs in the general course. Ah, but you probably don’t know what I’m even talking about, haha.”

Mai: “No, no, it sounds very interesting! May I ask why you were scouted for this company?”

Latte: “I was told that it was due to my efforts as an outstanding and inspiring teacher. It made me so excited to accept their offer, and many of my students urged me to go as well! However, to my misfortune I can’t seem to remember how I got here…”

Hayasaka: (“Not even she knows… I see a pattern starting to emerge here. Does *no one* remember anything to do with how we got here…?”)

Mai: “It sounds like you’re in a very similar situation to us. But you have nothing to worry about, looking as pretty as you are!”

Latte: “Ahaha, aw, please, you’re too kind…!”

Kurumada: “Alright, that’s enough flirtin’.”

Mai: “I don’t understand your problem, Kurumada. If you’re so dead-set on investigating, you and Hayasaka can continue while I talk to Latte a little longer.”

Kurumada: “Fine by me.”

Hayasaka: “Wait, what–ah!”

Without preparation, Hayasaka was grabbed by Kurumada and dragged away from the current aisle.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, t-that was uncalled for…! It was kind of rude to do that, you know.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, well, aren’t we s’posed to be lookin’ around for clues? We both find this place suspicious as hell, and Mai’s hardly bein’ cautious about it.”

Hayasaka: “...I suppose you have a point, but…”

Kurumada: “It’s fine. I don’t hate her or nothin’. She’s our friend at the end of the day. Let’s just keep searchin’ around here.”

Hayasaka: “Alright.”

The two continued around the supermarket, until they spotted two girls idling around a book aisle. They both wore the same school uniform, however appeared rather different in stature and hair style. Kurumada walked up to them, Hayasaka following close behind.

Kurumada: “Hey there.”

The shorter of the two turned to him, raising a brow at his large stance.

???: “Who’re you two?”

Kurumada: “The name’s Kurumada, and this is Hayasaka. We ain’t a threat, so just hurry up and introduce yourselves.”

???: “Excuse me? That’s a bit rude, you creep.”

Kurumada: “I just said I ain’t a threat, goddamnit! And I hate kids anyway.”

???: “Why don’t you just leave then?!”

???: “N-Natsuki, that’s quite enough!”

???: “Eh? But he was being rude to us, you know.”

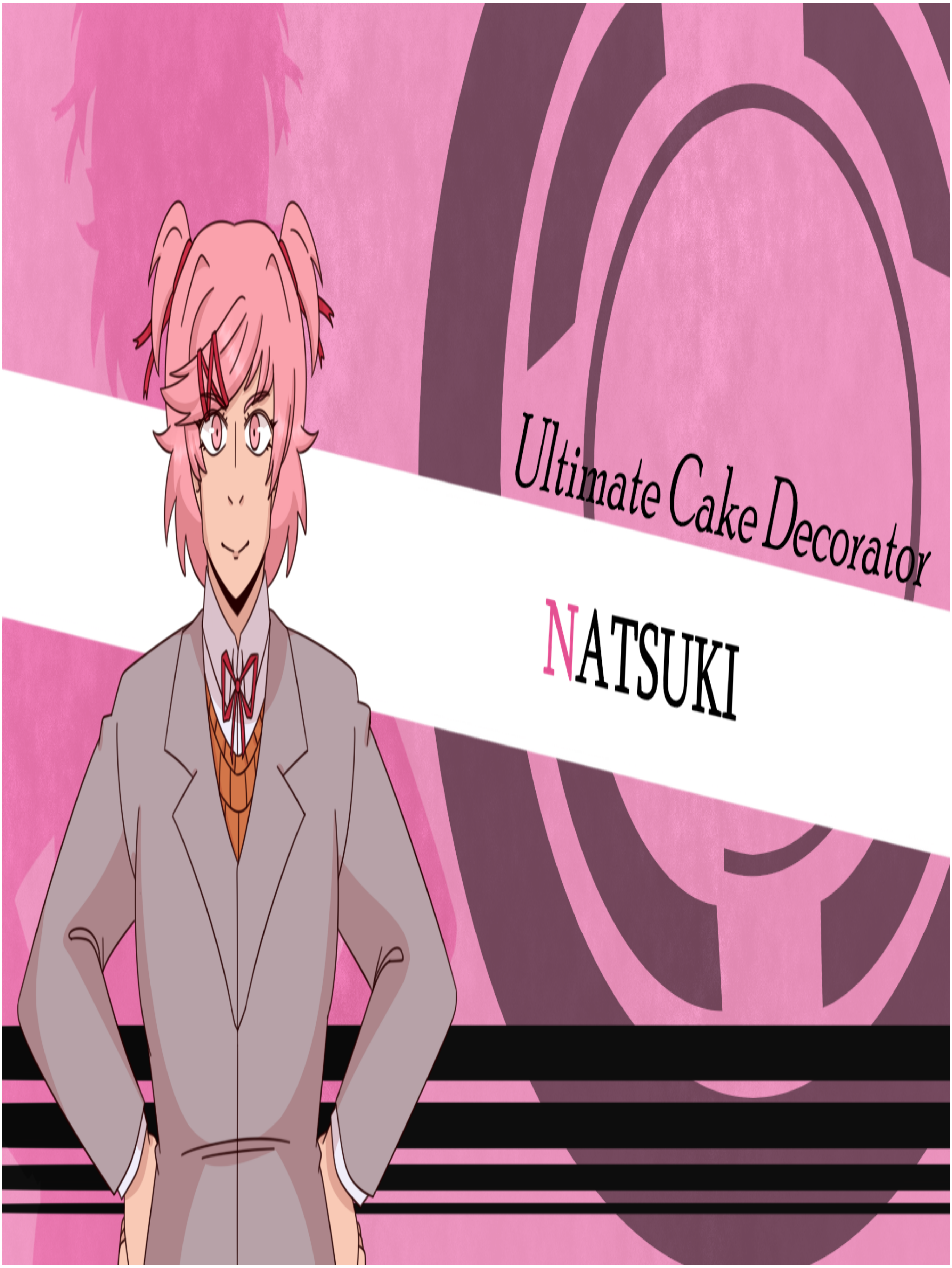
???: “Still, that doesn’t mean you can be rude back. It’s not smart to fight fire with fire…”

???: “...I guess. Sorry about that, I didn’t mean to act so hostile.”

Hayasaka: “That’s alright. Isn’t it, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Uh, yeah. Sorry. Didn’t mean to get so heated either.”

???: “Well, since you wanted to know who we are, I’m Natsuki, the Ultimate Cake Decorator.”


Ultimate Cake Decorator
NATSUKI

Kurumada: “And you?”

???: “U-Um… I’m Yuri. The Ultimate Novel Enthusiast…”

Ultimate Novel Enthusiast
YURI

Hayasaka: (“Yuri seems rather timid… She didn’t seem so pleased in having to calm down her friend, either. Haha, what a parallel…”)

Yuri: “We apologise for our behaviour, it’s just that our lack of memories on how we arrived here have put us on edge…”

Natsuki: “Yeah, it’s super weird. We’re having a hard time trusting people, that’s all.”

Hayasaka: “Don’t worry, we’re in a similar boat actually… So, uh, do you two go to the same school?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, me and Yuri are friends. We both met at the school’s literature club, which is by far the best club for only four members.”

Kurumada: “Only four? Can that even be considered a club? Sounds kinda quiet to me.”

Yuri: “T-That’s why I like it, actually… It’s a rather peaceful place to be able to read, a-among other activities. And despite us both enjoying different types of literature, we find comfort in each other…”

Natsuki: “H-Hey! They don’t need to know that!”

Yuri: “Ah! S-Sorry!”

Kurumada: “D’ya know anything else that might be helpful?”

Natsuki: “Don’t bother asking us any detective crap. We’ve been more focused on trying to keep calm and find help.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, that’s understandable… Well, we wish you luck on that.”

Yuri: “T-Thank you…”

Hayasaka and Kurumada parted ways with the two girls, checking out the remainder of the supermarket briefly before deciding to retrieve Mai. Fortunately, they found her closeby in the bakery aisle.

Mai: “There you two are! I was worried you had wandered off elsewhere.”

Hayasaka: “We wouldn’t leave you behind, especially on an island, haha…”

Kurumada: “Uh, sorry for snappin’ earlier, Mai.”

Mai: “Don’t even begin to worry about it! I was the one who suggested we look around in the first place, so I understand why you were upset.”

Hayasaka: (“I’m glad to see that sorted out pretty quickly…”)

Kurumada: “While we were searchin’, we met two more girls. Natsuki an’ Yuri, cake decorator and novel enthusiast respectively. Actually, sayin’ it aloud myself makes me wonder why the hell their talents are so damn specific…”

Mai: “Oooh, a cake decorator, hm? How cute! I wonder if I’ll be able to see her baking skills one day…!”

Hayasaka: “I suppose we should leave for somewhere else now…?”

Kurumada: “Sounds good to me.”

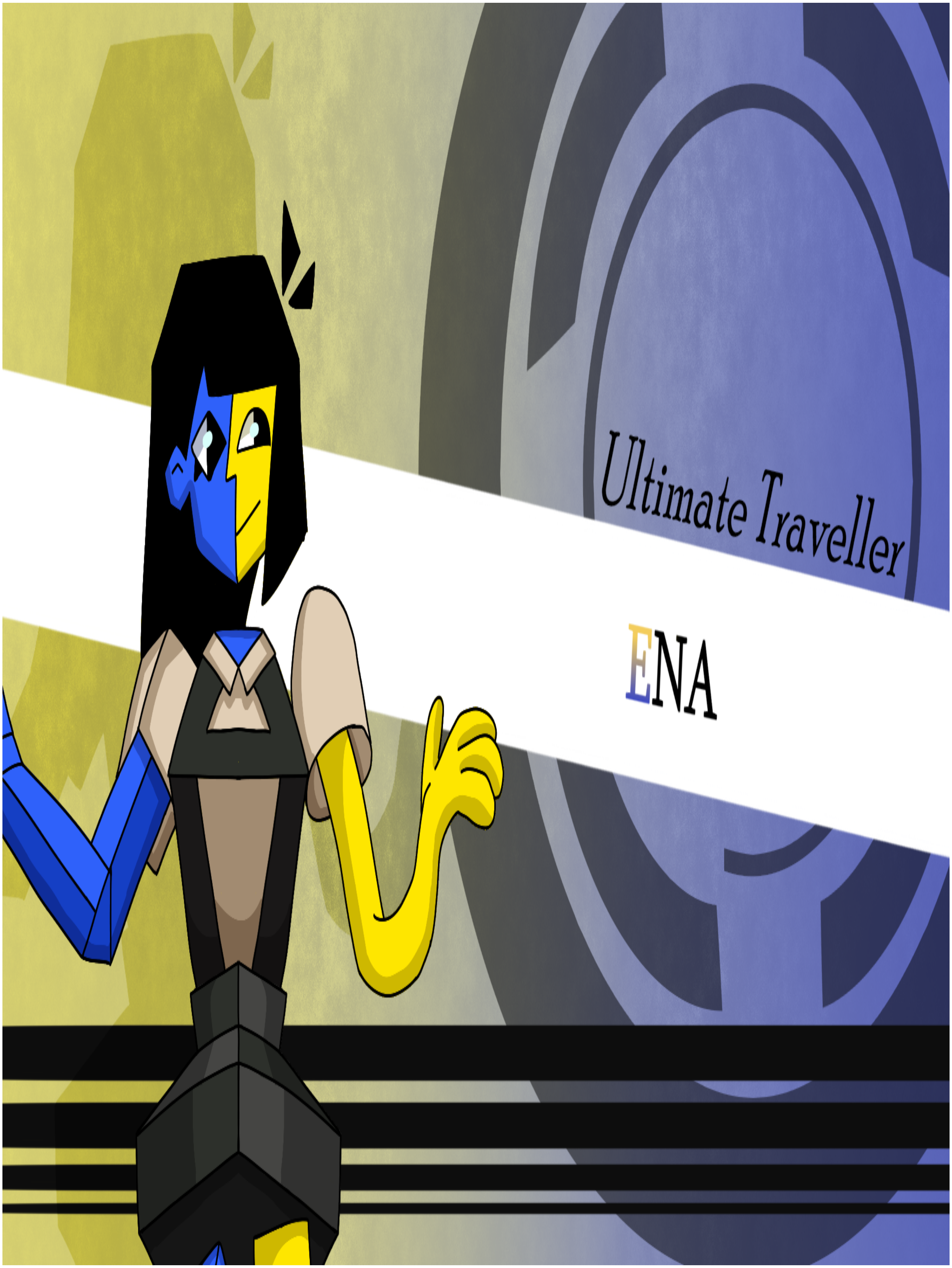
Making their way out of the supermarket, the three started back onto the path towards hopefully somewhere new. It didn’t take long to hit another upcoming area, Hayasaka realising it wasn’t a building at all this time, but rather a park: cobblestone tiles surrounded by palm trees and other tropical flora. In the middle stood a large fountain where two stone snakes twisted around each other, water flowing peacefully into the fountain pool below from their open mouths. But what stood out more to Hayasaka than anything else was the presence of a duo-toned figure swaying gracefully with the breeze. They soon noticed the three’s approach, and pirouetted towards them, their half-yellow half-blue hues blurring in and out until they came to a halt and bowed.

???: “Salutations my new acquaintances! What wonderful weather has been sprouting about in the sky! What say you?”

Mai: “Hello! I’m Mai, and these are my friends Kurumada and Hayasaka.”

Kurumada: “Haha, uh, are you the Ultimate Dancer or somethin’?”

???: “Oh, no no no no! No no! I am Ena, the Ultimate Traveller!”


Ultimate Traveller
ENA

Mai: “How interesting! And what does that entail?”

Ena: “Ah, yes, my many many adventures over the plains of existence! Travelling to the Great Runas’ room was one of my most recent expeditions!”

Hayasaka: (“Do they expect us to know what that is…?”) “Do you mind me asking if you remember how you got here?”

Ena: “Remember, remember… Ah, I can’t seem to remember at all… Oh dear, oh dear indeed…”

Without as much as a warning, Ena’s face shifted to monotone as they hung lethargically to one side and started to sob with sorrowful eyes.

Ena: “I’m useless! So useless! I have the brain of a boysenberry! I wish never to be seen with such sweet uselessness!”

???: “Ugh, are you crying over the smallest thing *again* ? I can’t take you anywhere, Ena.”

Ena: “Oh, I should just stay inside and curl up into a ball until I’m nothing but a puddle!”

???: “Calm down, would you?”

Very swiftly, Ena had stood up straight again, the yellow and blue wiping back onto their face.

Ena: “Very and truly sorry for the outburst, dear acquaintances!”

Hayasaka: “W-Who was that?”

Ena: “Fear not! That was simply my dear best companion, Moony!”

Mai: “Moony?”

Ena then dug into their pocket and retrieved a small moon with an oddly eccentric design and one eye that narrowed at the three.

Moony: “Wowch, what a bunch of losers.”

Kurumada: “Excuse you.”

Ena: “Moony! Do not be rude to our new friends! We must treat them with much respect!”

Moony: “What-ever…”

Moony proceeded to float out of Ena’s palm and off elsewhere, causing Ena to quickly drain back to only monotone once more.

Ena: “Hey, don’t leave me! I don’t want to be on my own! It’s *scaaary* !”

Ena quickly chased behind Moony, limbs slack and tears running down their cheeks melodramatically.

Hayasaka: (“I won’t lie, I’m very intrigued by their looks. But, I feel like I should stay cautious around them, considering their… *odd* behaviour.”)

As Kurumada and Mai continued to watch Ena flee away, Hayasaka decided to scan around the park once more. He stopped as he noticed someone standing by the fountain, intently gazing at the snake statue. Hayasaka felt the urge to walk up to them, seeing as how they were also dressed in a suit and glasses. He quietly made his way over to the man, who hadn’t quite picked up on his arrival yet.

Hayasaka: “Hello there.”

???: “A-Ah! Oh, hello…”

Hayasaka: “Sorry for startling you. I’m Hayasaka, the Ultimate Office Worker. I know that sounds like a silly talent – which it is – so I’d advise you to ignore it mostly, haha…”

???: “No, that’s okay. It doesn’t sound that weird to me. Um, I guess I should introduce myself too? I’m–”

Kurumada: “Oi, why’d ya run off for, eh?”

Mai: “Oh, who’s this? They kind of look similar to you, Hayasaka!”

Before the man could get a word in, both Kurumada and Mai had creeped up behind Hayasaka, stunning the two into silence with their much louder voices.

Kurumada: “Similar? Ha! More like downright identical! It’s like he’s lookin’ in a damn mirror! Bahaha!”

Mai: “Isn’t that funny? Hehe!”

???: “Ah, uh…”

Hayasaka: “G-Guys, please… Don’t you think this is a little rude…?”

Kurumada: “Oh, sorry. I guess it is. Kinda looks like we’re overwhelmin’ the guy. We’re friendly, don’t worry. Name’s Kurumada.”

Mai: “And I’m Mai!”

???: “That’s alright… My name’s Brian Pasternack.”

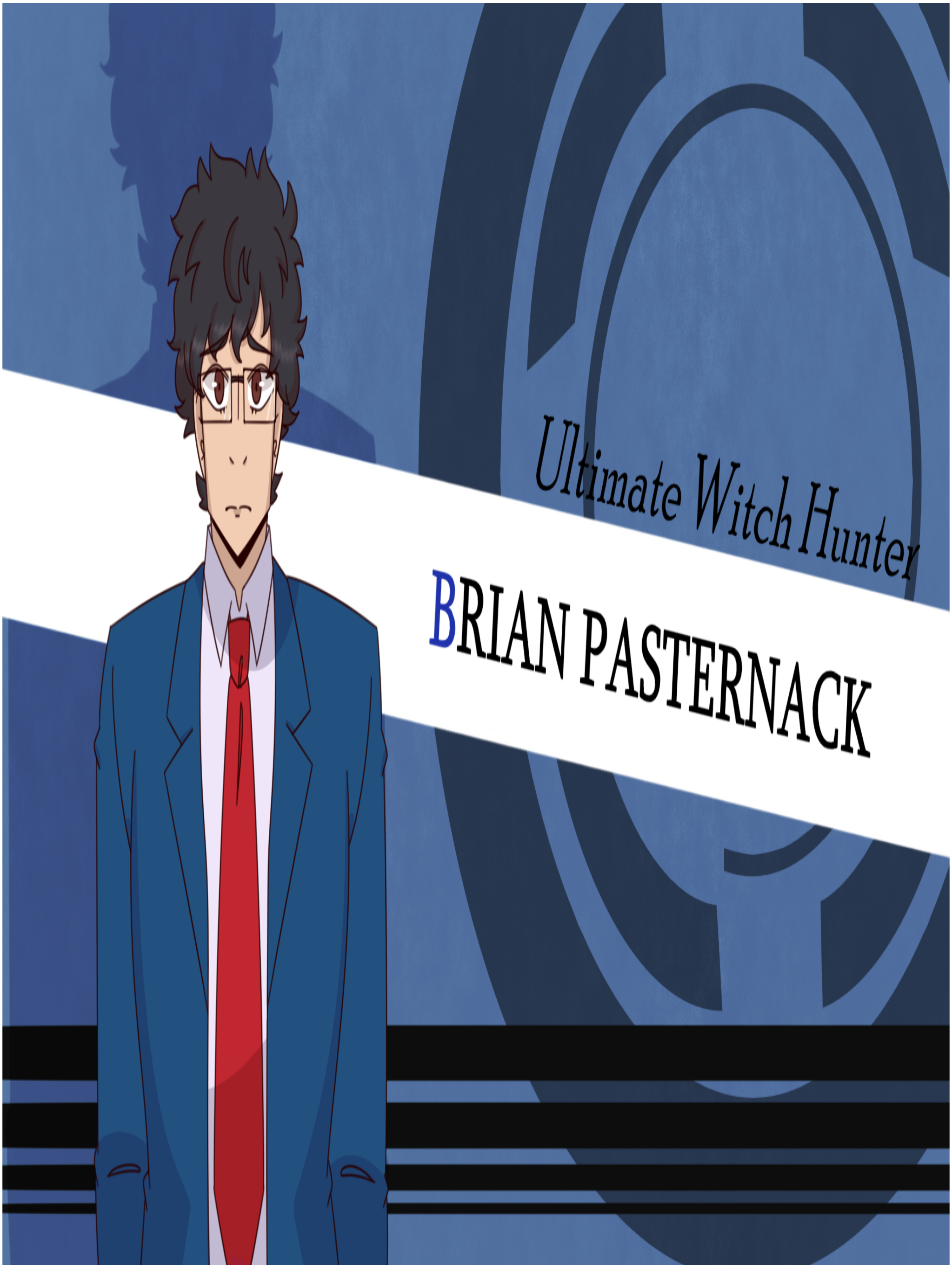
Kurumada: “So what’s your talent then?”

Brian: “U-Um…”

Kurumada: “Bet it’s gonna be somethin’ similar to yours, eh Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“Just from what he’s wearing alone, alongside that briefcase he’s holding, it does appear he has something to do with an office firm…”)

Brian: “Well, a-actually, I’m… the Ultimate Witch Hunter.”


Ultimate Witch Hunter
BRIAN PASTERNACK

Hayasaka: “ *Huh* …?”

Kurumada: “Uh, is that some kinda joke? I’ve had enough of people messin’ around with their talent names, y’know.”

Brian: “I-I know it sounds like one, but I swear I’m telling the truth! I never wanted to be a witch hunter in the first place, but I was roped into being one without much of a choice…”

Mai: “Oh?”

Brian: “I never would’ve imagined I’d be hired again under a similar affiliation by a different company, and I only accepted because I was curious… a-and mostly fearful what they’d do if I refused.”

Hayasaka: (“Brian’s situation sounds unfortunate… He doesn’t look like the type who should be dealing with the paranormal. I can definitely relate to being forced into things against my will, too…”)

Kurumada: “Heh, you really *are* the most average guy here after all, Hayasaka. Not even this guy has a normal talent.”

Hayasaka: “ *How kind of you to point out…* ”

Kurumada: “Oh, uh, s-sorry. I didn’t really think about the implications of what I said. No offence, y’know.”

Hayasaka: “... *sigh* , I suppose none taken. So, Brian, do you have any idea what’s going on? More so to do with how and why we’re here?”

Brian: “Ah, sorry, I have no idea. I’m just as confused as everyone else appears to be, which is a first for me. I really did wish I knew something, but…”

Hayasaka: “No, that’s okay.” (“I feel oddly the same as Brian. I wonder if that’s just my worker’s instinct kicking in seeing him in uniform or if he really is just a very similar person to me…”)

Brian: “A-Anyway, I guess I should get going and leave you guys alone now, huh?”

Brian then attempted to excuse himself, but before he could even walk too far off, a loud chime echoed about the open park, halting him mid-step. Hayasaka darted his eyes around to find the source of the sound, and eventually realised it had come from a monitor fixed to a tree, similar to how the surveillance camera was at the beach. Both he, Kurumada and Mai, and Brian, watched in stunned confusion as the monitor buzzed to life, displaying faint static overlaid over a distorted silhouette of something lurking in the shadows on the screen.

???: “Kehehe… Welcome, everyone, to my island. Island Nesos. I hope you’ve gotten comfortable and found everything fast.”

Hayasaka: (“Island… *Nesos* ? Then… this *is* the company’s doing? But, what’s going on? Who’s on the screen…?”)

???: “I’ve been eyeing all of you very, very closely, and I can see that everyone’s gotten familiar with the basics of the island… Hehe. Well then, we don’t want to keep each other waiting. Please make your way over to Nesos Park at your quickest convenience. The place with the statue, for you slower ones. I hate waiting around, so you better appear fast.”

Just as it had turned on, the monitor was switched off without a second comment. Hayasaka remained staring at the blank screen for a moment longer, an unnerving sensation churning inside him.

Brian: “O-Oh wow, and we’re already here, aren’t we? Haha, um…”

Timidly, Brian shuffled back towards the fountain, keeping his eyes locked towards the floor.

Hayasaka: (“For some reason, I didn’t like that announcement, at all…”)

Kurumada: “The hell was that?”

Mai: “Hm, perhaps that was one of the company’s representatives coming to greet us finally?”

Kurumada: “And why was the screen all black and shit then? Kinda crappy monitors…”

Mai: “Don’t bash them. Technology could be unpredictable on an island.”

Kurumada: “So, again, why the *fuck* are we on an island?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…”

Regardless, the three decided to wait it out, noticing as the people they had met so far had startled to trickle into the park as well, Hayasaka recognising each and every face.

Kurumada: “Is that really *everyone* ? All the people we’ve met already?”

Hayasaka: “I mean, it’ll be easier to keep track of such a small group, right? Haha…” (“But I have to say, only 16 people in total is a little strange… I suppose they only intended to hire a small amount of people?”)

There was only small chatter between a few people to begin with as they waited for the voice who instructed them to come here to appear. However after what seemed like a longer than necessary wait, some had decided to become more vocal.

Walter: “So, there seems to only be 16 people here in total… Strange. Does anyone have any idea of what we’re waiting for, or what’s going on?”

Ena: “No idea, my good sir!”

Latte: “Me neither…”

Retsuko: “You’d think that everything would’ve gotten explained in the letter, huh?”

Mai: “You mean the letter accepting us into this company?”

Jesse: “Hey, we got that too!”

Walter: “Of course they did, Jesse. We must’ve all been invited to this Nesos organisation via a letter… But, no one seems to remember how we got here. And Nesos… If I’m not mistaken, that’s ancient Greek for ‘island’...”

Jesse: “Haha, oh my god: this place is practically called ‘Island Island’.”

Walter: “Be quiet, Jesse.”

L: “This means that we were always meant to be taken to an island. This is no mistake.”

Latte: “Oh dear, I wish I knew that in the first place. I’m not very keen on islands: my skin isn’t compatible with hot temperatures *or* water…”

Mai: “Hmph, shame on the company for not taking your needs into account!”

Natsuki: “And as well as that, I haven’t seen a single holiday rep anywhere. I thought they were supposed to be, like, everywhere.”

Brian: “M-Maybe they were just getting our initiation ready…?”

Hiroshi: “Unlikely. They wouldn’t need the entirety of the staff to perform something like that. I even managed to check inside the hotel’s staff room, and no one was inside.”

Kaidou: “Eh? You went into the staff room without permission?!”

Saiki: “ *Permission from who exactly* …?”

Bojack: “Would you all stop complaining for a moment? It’s giving me a headache. Why are you all being so uptight about this, anyway? Look–”

Bojack stepped forward, crossing his arms.

Bojack: “–Whoever called us here, just show yourselves already. You’re making everyone freak out. It’s annoying. And I’m getting pissed off.”

Walter: “Hey, calm down. What are you trying to achieve exactly?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, shoutin’ around is stupid idea, y’know.”

Ena: “Oh no no no! The horse’s whinneys may attract a wild animal!”

Yuri: “H-Huh?!”

Kaidou: “Don’t worry! I’ll protect you from whatever may try and attack us! You can rely on me!”

Saiki: “ *I really doubt you’ll be able to do anything by yourself* .”

Bojack: “Kid, stop being delusional, there’s nothing–”

???: “Ehehehe! Oh, really? Are you proposing a fight? How exhilarating! I can’t wait to gorge your eyes out in that case, kehehe!”

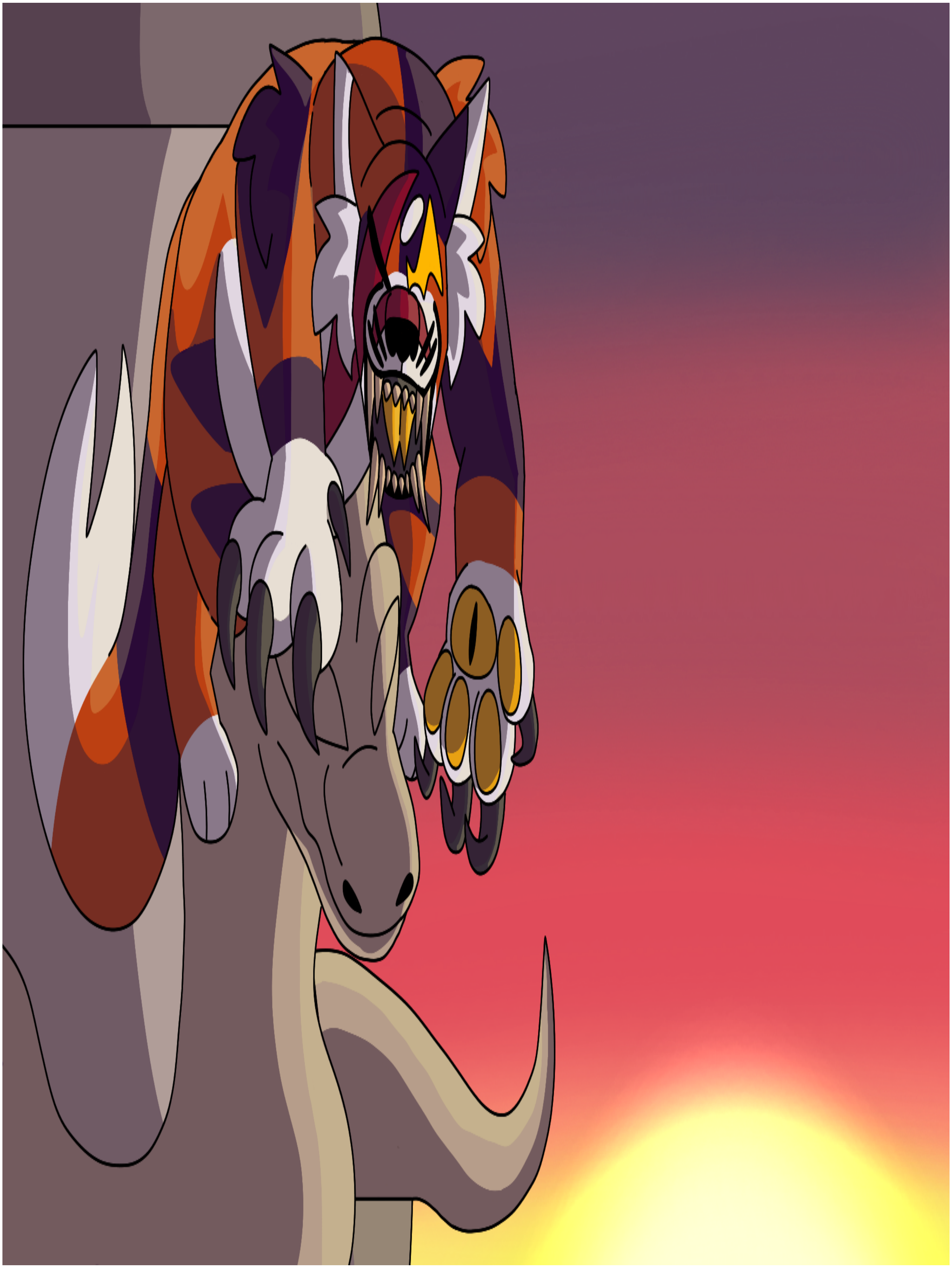
Hayasaka: (“ *Huh* ? W-Who was that…?”)

Kaidou: “W-Wha…?!”

Bojack: “The *hell* …?”

???: “...Huh? No response? Man, so you weren’t being serious? That’s shameful. You really got my blood rushing! Ah, nevermind, hahaha! It’s about time we meet each other!”

Following the air of growing confusion and fear, everyone stood still, unsure what was going to appear where. And then, it finally appeared. Like a blur of pure adrenaline, something large and ravenous pounced atop of the snake statues, it’s tail swishing around in a frenzy as it peered down at everyone with one meticulously hungry eye.



Hayasaka: (“W-What… What is *that* …?!”)

???: “Oh, oh, oh! You’re all so frightened! I can see how scared you all are from your faces! Fear is so controlling! Ahaha!”

Natsuki: “What the hell is that?!”

Jesse: “What the fuck?! That cat’s speaking n’ shit!”

???: “I am NOT a cat! I’m the furthest from my tame, WEAK domesticated counterpart! Can’t you see what I am from my stripes? My teeth? Tell me, what am I?”

Hiroshi: “...A *tiger* .”

???: “Hehehe, and not just any tiger. I am Monotora, Nesos Island’s dutiful rep!”

Hayasaka: (“That can’t be a real tiger, can it? N-No, it’s completely modified… A robot most likely. Yet, the technology looks too well-developed…”)

Bojack: “Ha-ha, are you serious? *This* is the company’s rep? A wild animal?”

Monotora: “I am very much real. Unlike your hair tone.”

Bojack: “Hey, how the hell do you know that?! I-I mean, why are you making up things? As my hair is definitely black. As it always has been.”

Monotora: “Hehehe, oh it’s just so fun to toy with my prey. I heard you all talking about the letter you received from the company earlier, as well… It brings my heart so much excitement to know that you all accepted Nesos’ offer…!”

Retsuko: “Um, about that, Mr. Monotora, what exactly *is* this job? It was never specified in the letter.”

Kurumada: “And more importantly, why are we on a goddamn island for this job?!”

Monotora: “Oh, you like the location? Hehe, we’re practically in the middle of nowhere. Be sure to thank the hard workers of Nesos for providing all necessary resources like electricity and food! Personally I don’t need any of that, I can fulfil my own needs myself. It’s a shame how dependent creatures like you have become these days… But this wasn’t done without reason. It’s so you can all focus on your job without any outside interference or distractions!”

Jesse: “Uh, that’s cool n’ all, but like when can I contact my friends and shit? And like, when can we go home?”

Monotora tilted their head, and smirked.

Monotora: “Home? You want to go home? But, you’re not leaving. You’re not allowed to leave.”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…? Did I just hear that correctly? What are they talking about?”)

Yuri: “N-Not allowed… to leave?”

Ena: “We’ve been trapped! Wah! I can’t be trapped here forever! I’ll go crazy! I’ll tear out my hair and melt!”

Walter: “Tell us this job already. What the hell do you intend for us to do? Why are we on this island?”

Monotora: “Hehe… hahaha… AHAHAHAHA~!”

Monotora’s sickening shrill continued, as they glared down at the group.

Monotora: “ *So no one can hear you scream as you rip each other’s guts out.* ”

Kurumada: “What…?!”

Mai: “Huh…?!”

Hayasaka: “W-What… What’re you talking about?”

Monotora: “Each and every one of you meat puppets has been chosen to participate in a mutual death game, hosted by the company who scouted you in the first place! Ahaha!”

Hayasaka: (“Death… *death game* ?”)

Kaidou: “U-Um, what do you mean by… death game?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, you’re making no sense. It’s creeping me out…”

Monotora: “Heh. You see, everyone will live together on this island in mutual peace for the rest of your lives… Well, most of the time. If you wish to leave, then you must commit murder on another one of your fellow *co-workers* without being caught. Then, and only then, you’ll be free to leave this island!”

Brian: “...A-And by murder, you mean…?”

Monotora: “Ahahaha, are you kiddin’ me?! Stabbing, bludgeoning, beating, strangling, drowning, torture! Whatever the hell you want! My personal favourite is mauling and gnawing at my prey until they’re an unrecognisable pulp of flesh! Perhaps I should try it out on you as an example?”

Brian: “W-W-What?! N-No!”

Hiroshi: “And what? You expect of us to try and murder people we don’t even know–”

L: “What exactly counts as getting away with murder?”

Latte: “Why are you asking such a thing? Have you already taken what they’ve said to heart…?”

L: “Of course not. I’m simply curious of this murder condition they have going on.”

Hayasaka looked toward L. He was biting the tip of his thumb, face completely calm as he stared straight at Monotora.

Monotora: “Kehehe, I wonder why more people can’t act like him right now… But I’ll gladly answer your question. To commit murder is one thing, and to get away with it is another. To let you off the island just like that wouldn’t be very fair for the others, y’know? So, an *executive trial* will be held after a murder has been commited, allowing all remaining co-workers to have a fair discussion over who they believe the culprit is. What is to be discussed will be left up to the lucky people still alive… If they can successfully weed out the dirty murderer red-handed, then all promises to leave the island will be stripped away as they are punished accordingly. Think of it as your standard justice system. However, if you sorry lot become answerless or fail to correctly identify the killer, then they *will* be leaving the island as you all suffer the punishment instead of them! Think of it as your standard justice system… flipped on its head! Ahaha!”

Mai: “And so, if someone were to follow those steps up until that point, they’d be allowed to leave the island…”

Monotora: “Bingo! I’m glad to hear some of you catch on quickly.”

Jesse: “Alright–”

Jesse raised his hands up towards his head, rolling his eyes.

Jesse: “ –I get it. Elaborate prank. Very funny. This place is cooler than I thought. But you can stop now. I think we get the gist of the joke.”

Monotora: “Oh?”

Walter: “ *Jesse* , what the hell are you doing?”

Jesse: “This can’t be real, Mr. White. Just think about it. A *death game* ? They’re just fucking with us, c’mon.”

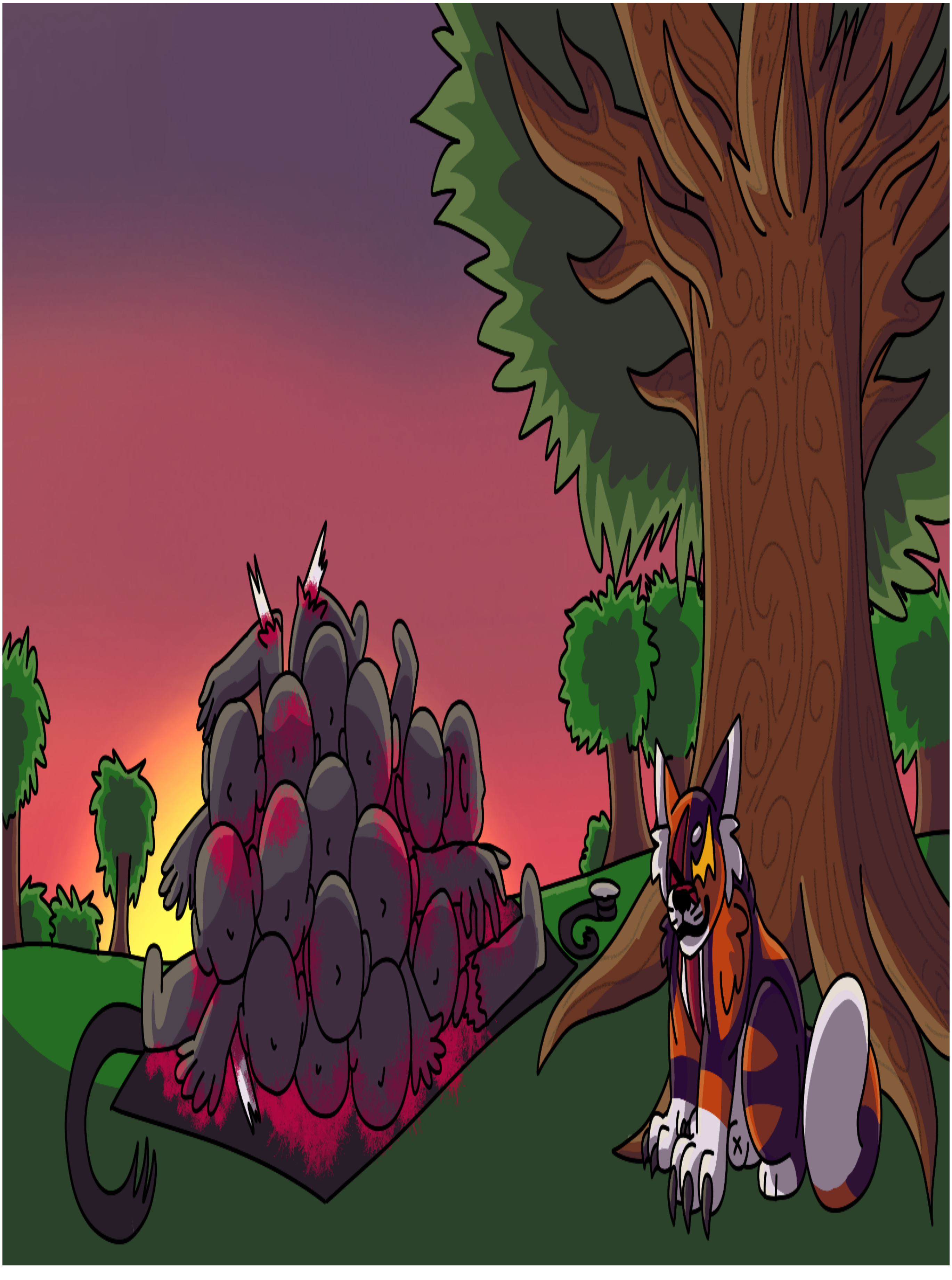
Monotora: “I expect everyone to participate within the rules of the death game, or else you’ll be actively going against the rules by opting out, y’know? And going against the rules results in punishment.”

Hayasaka: (“Punishment…?”)

Before anyone had the chance to speak up, Monotora had jumped down from the statue and towards one of the many trees surrounding the park. They bared their claws and with one swift swipe, cut an inconspicuous cord hiding from plain sight. All at once, a giant sack dropped to the ground with a heavy smack that reverbed around the park. The sack’s top, no longer held up by the rope, fell, revealing a sight Hayasaka had never expected to witness.

VIDEO

Bodies. Many bodies. Bodies piled up on each other, limbs squashed and laying in all sorts of impossible directions. Blood soaked everywhere. Organs on display. Not a single face could be identified. A pile of rotting meat and nothing more.



Yuri: “Ah… *Aaaah* …”

Natsuki: “T-That’s… *hurk* !”

Kurumada: “What the *hell* ?!”

Monotora: “Heads up!”

Monotora snatched an open skull from the pile and hurled it towards Jesse, who stumbled to catch it. He turned it around in his hands in confusion, only to immediately drop it to the ground as his eyes widened greatly.

Jesse: “Ah– *f-fuck* !”

Walter, who was standing next to him, eyed the skull on the ground, and promptly winced in anger.

Walter: “It’s real, alright…”

Bojack: “Oh, great job. Really well done. Thanks for letting us see this ‘lovely display’.”

Jesse: “J-Just screw off, man!”

Monotora: “You see, people, *this* is what happens when you defy the rules. Is this what you wish to become? Hehe…”

Monotora leaped back in front of the group, this time opting to stand on the fountain’s edge.

Monotora: “Now then, do we have any other means of defiance?”

Everyone remained silent. Hayasaka felt his heart race so nauseatingly in his chest that he felt physically strained and weak.

Kurumada: “*... Fuck this* .”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “I’ve had enough of this bastard’s bullshit! Ya think it’s alright to go around paradin’ all this?! I’ll fuckin’ sock the daylights outta ya!”

Monotora: “ *Huh* ? Are you blind, or are you really that stupid? Can you not see the pile of bodies right in front of you? You’re askin’ for the same fate here, y’know?”

Kurumada: “Ya think I give a shit? I’m leavin’ this goddamn island with my friends one way or another!”

Mai: “What’re you saying, Kurumada?! Are you even thinking at all?”

Hayasaka: “P-Please, calm down!”

Neither Mai nor Hayasaka’s pleas could persuade Kurumada, as he immediately charged straight for Monotora, raising his fist back to swing right for the tiger. Unfortunately for him, Monotora was faster and a lot more agile, and they easily dodged the oncoming attack like it was child’s play. In turn, they raised their claws with a malicious grin, swinging down on Kurumada, who barely managed to jump back in time to not be given a nasty gnash down his face. Sliding backwards and kicking up dirt, Kurumada sucked in a heavy breath.

Kurumada: “ *S-Shit* …!”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada!”

Hayasaka was right by his side in a heartbeat, alongside Mai who was close behind.

Hayasaka: “A-Are you alright?! You’re not hurt, are you?”

Kurumada: “I’m fine…”

Mai: “Ugh, how could you?! You dirty animal! Why did you attack him like that?!”

Monotora: “Why’re you blaming ME?! He was the one who attacked first! You saw, didn’t you? It’s only fair that he receives the consequence of his own foolish actions! Just be grateful I’m letting you off lightly here: you’ve all seen enough corpses for one day.”

The group remained silent, save for Hayasaka quietly attempting to make sure Kurumada wasn’t lying about receiving any injuries.

Saiki: “ *This killing game… really is real* .”

Monotora: “Finally starting to understand it, huh? Heheh, congratulations! Of course, no one *has* to die, but remember that you’ll have to live out the rest of your lives on this island, which isn’t ideal for the youngsters, eh? So I’d recommend you get to plannin’ a murder as soon as humanly possible! Yes, full-offence to the non-humans in the crowd, kehehe!”

Sadistically laughing all the while, Monotora pounced away into the trees, escaping the scene and leaving the group trapped in an air of heavy silence that lingered for a long, long time. Kurumada eventually heaved himself back up to full height, clenching his fist tightly and glaring at the ground.

Kurumada: “Dammit… *God Dammit* …! I wished I got that fuckin’ bastard!”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…” (“I’m scared to comfort him. He’s mad right now. I’ll give him space, but… What now? What are we supposed to do now, after hearing all of that? Do we accept it? Do we deny it? I-I don’t… I don’t know what’s going on anymore…”)

Walter: “...Before anyone gets any ideas, everyone should stay calm and analyse the situation. The last thing we need after that is more chaos.”

Bojack: “Are you kidding me? Who’s gonna even stay remotely calm after that? We need to retaliate immediately. Throw some labour laws in this company’s goddamn face. Get the press involved–I don’t know.”

Kaidou: “R-Retaliate? Like a strike…?”

Hiroshi: “We shouldn’t try anything reckless, unless we wish to end up like the pile of bodies over there.”

Ena: “W-Wah! I don’t want to be a pile of mushy organs! Too squishy!”

Yuri: “I-I don’t like this… This is far too similar to the plot of a horror novel, a-and yet…”

Latte: “...What do we do now? The whole idea of a lovely vacation job has been ruined because of this… *death game* .”

L: “I’d say we don’t trust anyone.”

Mai: “Huh…?”

L: “One us one might already be planning a murder in their head right now and we’d be none the wiser. It’s not smart to continue on believing everyone around you is an ally.”

Brian: “Is that… really what we should do?”

Kurumada: “Tch… *Murder* …”

Hayasaka glanced around at each face, either full of pent-up anger or startled with painful fear.

Hayasaka: ("To not remember how we woke up on this island, only to be told we're trapped here for the rest of our lives unless we kill someone? This has got to be some sort of sick joke, hasn't it? And yet… it's been made clear just how serious this is. Murder…? Haha. I couldn't. I could *never* kill someone. But, I'm afraid I can't say the same for everyone else… I don't know most of these people, and therefore I have no idea what any of them are capable of. Does that mean I can't trust them? I don't want to accept that, either. I want to trust them, and yet the more I think about it, the more I want to run – start fleeing far, far away. Haha, that'd be easy, wouldn't it? To just flee?")

Hayasaka looked around once more. No matter how hard he looked, nothing had changed. He exhaled a shaky breath as only one thought surfaced in the front of his mind:

He didn't want to die .

PROLOGUE

Welcome to Your First Day on the Job!

16

Chapter End Notes

LET'S FUCKING GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

NEW CAST WHAT DO YOU THINK?!

So then, chapter 1 awaits us... but not before a funny little voting time with FREE TIME EVENTS! Yeah, you heard me right - YOU, the audience, will vote for 4 characters that Hayasaka will hang out with during the chapter 1 daily life! Perhaps vote for someone you don't know much about? No pressure though, just a thought!

LINK TO THE POLL:
[CLOSED - sorry!]

Anyway, would LOVE to hear your predictions for the deaths and all that! Don't by shy!

TYSM for reading! And have a lovely day or night! <3

Chapter 1: Blue Sky Sinking (Daily Life)

Chapter Notes

> Yo, yo, yo!
>
> So first off, this chapter is LONG. Like, super long. Clocking at around 17k words (yes you heard me right: even longer than DR69's final chapter), you'll probably need to set some time aside for this one. I've just decided to pack a lot more content into this fic...!
>
> OH and a quick note as I forgot to mention this previously, but if you didn't already catch on, Monotora uses they/them pronouns! Robo go no no gender
>
> Well what're we waitin' for? Read on!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayasaka: "..."

Hayasaka tapped his index and middle finger against his thumb at unprecedented intervals, in an attempt to soothe his nerves. He could feel his heart skip a beat faster as he took a deep breath.

So far, no one had dared to speak up. How long had it been since that tiger, Monotora, left them alone to wallow in such silent hysteria? Hayasaka couldn't recall: he was too focused on keeping himself afloat. It would be such an embarrassment if he fainted right now.

Hayasaka: ("This *death game* … Are we supposed to believe these rules? They're just so absurd… Not even a court would handle a trial in such a strange way. More importantly, what about the murder part? Haha, really? Murder? A-And yet… Ah, I can't even keep my thoughts straight at all.")

Latte: "...I know this may not be the most appropriate time to cheer everyone up, but, I believe we should all leave the park now. Staying here will only remind us of what we've just heard."

Bojack: "Sure, because that's gonna cheer me up after hearing that crap."

Yuri: “M-Me too. I just can’t stop thinking about those horrible words Monotora said…”

Natsuki: “Yuri, stop bringing down the mood! …B-But, ugh! I can’t help it – this whole thing is just sick!”

Hiroshi: “Is there any action we should take upon those bodies over there?”

L: “It’s not like we can do anything about them. Just try to ignore it.”

Kaidou: “D-Did… Did Monotora *really* kill all those innocent people…?”

Ena: “Oh! We’re all going to die! Die and perish! No, just take me first! Don’t hold back!”

Moony: “Ena, stop scaring everyone!”

Mai: “...Regardless if that’s Monotora’s doing or not, how they tried to attack Kurumada was no joke. We should be cautious around them, if not anything else.”

Kurumada grunted, dropping his head.

Kurumada: “... *Bastard* .”

Hayasaka glanced towards Kurumada, eyebrows knitted together. He parted his lips only for a moment, but no words came out. Instead, he looked around once more at the group surrounding him, especially at the ones who neglected to speak thus far.

Hayasaka: (“I’m just like them. We couldn’t speak, even if we wanted to.”)

Walter: “Jesse.”

Jesse: “W-Wha?”

Walter: “Come on. We’re going back to the hotel.”

Jesse simply nodded, Hayasaka clearly aware he was still reeling over the human skull that was thrown at him just a while ago. Silently, he trailed behind Walter, eyes flicking back to the group momentarily. Eventually, some of the others decided their course of action would be similar, leaving the park for presumably the hotel as well. Hayasaka watched as Kurumada and Mai looked at each other for a moment, before they too set off, Hayasaka having no choice but to follow behind. Like Jesse, Hayasaka made a quick look behind his shoulder at the few who hadn’t moved yet.

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps once someone makes a decision on what to do next, it’s just easier for everyone to follow along… Well, what else can we do?”)

Arriving solemnly at the hotel, Hayasaka almost jumped as he heard Mai make a sound of interest beside him.

Mai: “Oh, won’t you look at that? The elevator and stairs have been unlocked.”

Kurumada: “Let’s take a look upstairs, I guess…”

They walked upstairs to find themselves overseeing a multitude of hotel rooms. Hayasaka looked at the closest one and saw a nameplate attached, ecched with the name of the room’s owner.

Hayasaka: (“So then, every room belongs to someone here, huh? How were they so certain each of us would go to the interview…?”)

Mai: “Hm, that’s a shame: my room’s on the other side of the hall. Well then, I think I’m going to take a look inside mine. Are you two going to do the same?”

Hayasaka: “I-I guess we should…”

Hayasaka found that his room neighboured Kurumada, who gave Hayasaka a curt nod before going into his own. Hayasaka sighed, slipping into his hotel room and silently shutting the door. Adjusting his glasses, he scanned the inside.

Hayasaka: (“The interior looks… basic. Just about like any other typical hotel I’ve stayed in before during a business trip… Oh? W-What’s that?”)

Hayasaka cautiously made his way over to the table situated in the room, where he noticed three items placed atop. The first, which he promptly picked up to get a better look at, was a note. It was crudely written, and signed off by someone he didn’t expect.

‘ *Dear co-worker,*

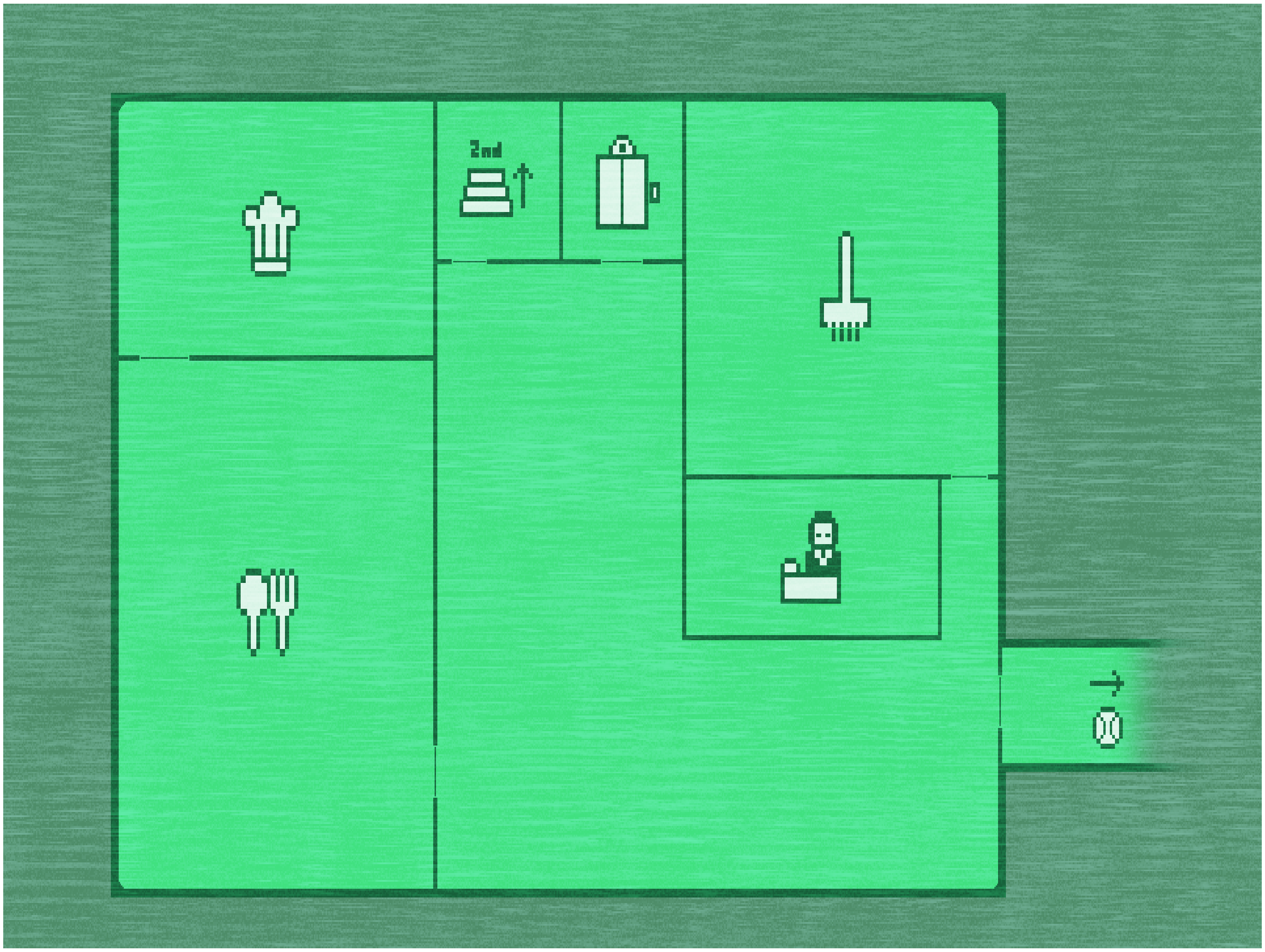
This is your hotel room! Provided to you are a key – one of a kind, don’t lose it! – and a tablet. The tablet has many functions to accommodate you during your time here at Nesos: a map, worker files, the rulebook and a messaging app. Please use them at your discretion.

Happy killing!

- Monotora

P.S. Make sure to ALWAYS lock your door before you sleep. Unless you’re masochistic enough to desire your door open to anyone who wishes to perform utterly horrible horrors beyond your comprehension on you, I advise that you keep your key extra safe!’

Setting the note down after being thoroughly intimidated, Hayasaka decided to pick up the small phone-sized tablet and turn it on. He firstly tapped on the icon representing the map, which displayed the hotel where he was currently situated.



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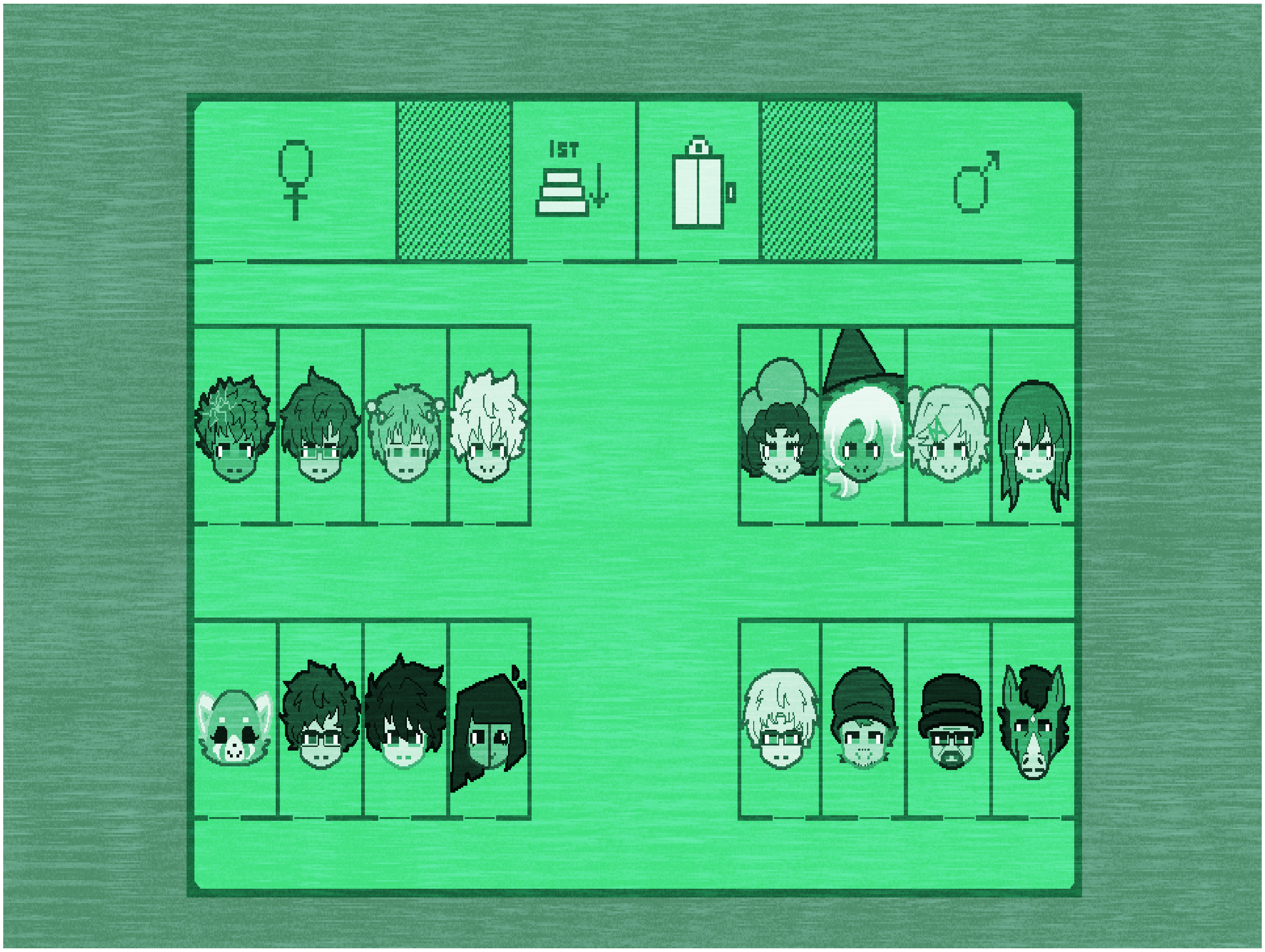


Hayasaka: ("I see… this is the entirety of the hotel then? At least we didn't miss anything last time. Now, I want to check out the rulebook mentioned on the note… God forbid I break one of them without knowing, haha…")

Hayasaka tapped the icon resembling the rules.

'ISLAND NESOS: RULEBOOK

1. *You and your co-workers will be coexisting on the confinements of Island Nesos for the rest of your foreseeable futures.*
2. *Nighttime is from 12A.M. to 7A.M. During this time, Monotora will be let loose to patrol/let off steam. It is recommended you stay indoors during this time.*
3. *You are free to explore the island, with minimal restrictions.*
4. *Violence against your Island Rep, Monotora, is strictly prohibited, and will result in punishment.*
5. *Once a murder takes place, an executive trial will begin shortly after an investigation period.*
6. *If the blackened is correctly exposed during the trial, they will receive punishment.*

7. *If the blackened is not exposed, or incorrectly identified, they will be allowed to leave the island and the remaining coworkers will receive punishment.*
8. *A body discovery announcement is played when three or more coworkers discover a body.*
9. *Additional rules may be added to this list at any time.'*

Hayasaka: ("God… So, what? Is this really it? Is this death game really real? These rules are written with too much authority over us to be considered a joke…")

Hayasaka's hand sank into his hair again, tugging at the roots as he shut his eyes tightly. A wave of sudden nausea washed over him.

Hayasaka: ("Haha… Perhaps I need to locate the bathroom quicker than I expected?")

PING.

Hayasaka shot his eyes open as he looked down at the tablet. The grip on his hair loosened as he read the message that had been sent to the newly created group chat in the messaging app.

[10:47 PM] Ena: Hellooooooo im tryin out the text thingy is anyone there

Hayasaka: ("Ena wrote that? N-No, it sounds more like Moony… Although, how is she managing to type without any hands?")

[10:48 PM] Mai: Moony, please give Ena back the tablet! It's rude to steal things from others.

[10:48 PM] Retsuko: Should we really be using the messaging app for this?

[10:49 PM] Bojack: how do u turn this thing off its already annoying me

Hayasaka stared at the messages that had been sent next, eyes drifting off for a moment. Another ping snapped him out of his thoughts as he read the new message.

[10:52 PM] Walter: Everyone, please meet me downstairs at the restaurant ASAP. I have an important matter I want to discuss. Make sure you have all read the note given to you and the rulebook on the tablet beforehand.

As he waited for anyone to reply, none came. He assumed everyone read the message Walter sent and were all preparing to head down to the restaurant.

Hayasaka: ("In that case, I suppose I should go too. I wouldn't like to be the last one there, that's for sure…")

After a minute of composing himself and checking to see if his hair was still somewhat presentable, Hayasaka picked up the key and slid it and the tablet into his pocket, and finally left his room. Arriving at the restaurant not long after, the first thing he noticed out of instinct was Kurumada slouched over a bar stool, still stunned and irritated after his short-lived fight with Monotora. Walking over to him, Kurumada noticed his approach and promptly sat up in an attempt to conceal his sulking.

Hayasaka: "...Kurumada, are you alright?"

Kurumada: "I'm fine. What happened back there doesn't matter. Did ya read the rules?"

Hayasaka: ("Obvious subject change, but… I won't push it.") "Uh, y-yeah. It's not like I couldn't – that would be stupid of me, haha…"

Kurumada: "...Just, fuck, what kinda sick bastards came up with this shit? It's like it came out of a damn movie or game or somethin'..."

Hayasaka: ("I wonder who *would* be capable of coming up with such a thing…?")

Kurumada: "Mai's been chatting up that Latte lady ever since I came in here. Her game ain't slick."

Hayasaka: “Huh? Um… M-Maybe Mai is just checking to see if she’s alright? Latte did mention something about a skin condition before.”

Kurumada: “Tch…”

Mai: “Hello, boys!”

Hayasaka looked over as he saw Mai saunder over to them.

Mai: “Kurumada, you look so shaken. Let’s hope a good sleep will put you at ease!”

Kurumada: “Yeah, ‘cuz that’s what I need here the most, sure…”

Hayasaka: “Mai, what do you think about the rules…?”

Mai: “I don’t really understand what’s going on, but I’m assured by the fact that no one else seems to know either – if everyone’s introductions didn’t clue us in enough. I’m a bit afraid to test what’ll happen if we try to break a rule, however…”

Hayasaka nodded. His eyes slowly made their way to the ground alongside the proceeding silence, until one voice spoke up amongst the chatter.

Walter: “Everyone, if I could have your attention.”

Hayasaka, as well as everyone else, aimed their sights towards Walter who stepped forth.

Walter: “I can assume you’ve all read the rules, am I correct?”

There were a few nods from the group.

Walter: “Good. Well then, I’d like to begin by referring to the second rule about the nighttime hours. From how it has been written, it can be inferred that Monotora can’t enter buildings, and therefore as long as we’re inside a building during these hours, we will be safe. Only the outside is dangerous and off-limits.”

Retsuko: “Ah, thank goodness. Then we’re safe to be in the hotel right now, at least.”

Bojack: “Sounds good enough for me.”

L: “The sports centre and supermarket are further areas we should be safe in as well. Anyone could survive the night in such a diligently stocked place.”

Natsuki: “Is all that food necessary for a single night?”

Walter: “Let’s not get too off-topic now, everyone. While it’s not mandatory to follow, I propose that we stick to a group rule that everyone must be in the hotel during the nighttime hours.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? And why’s that?”

Walter: “It’ll ensure everyone’s safety, and we can all make sure everyone’s in one place, just in case something were to happen.”

Yuri: “A-Are you referring to a murder…?”

Kaidou: “E-Eh?! Don’t bring that up so quickly!”

Walter: “That… may be a case.”

Latte: “But how will we keep track of everyone’s safety? The hotel’s rather large.”

Walter: “That’s where my second additional rule comes into play: every morning, let’s say around 7A.M. since that’s when nighttime ends, we will all gather here at the restaurant to hold a meeting and a headcount.”

Jesse: “...You really think someone’s gonna be killed, Mr. White?”

Walter: “I can’t deny the possibility, Jesse. However, the headcount will also be used to account for any suspicious behaviour.”

Bojack: “I’ve really got to wake up *that* early for this? This is worse than some of my contracts.”

Natsuki: “Whatever. I’m used to waking up early for school, anyway.”

Hiroshi: “Your proposal has been duly noted. I will arrive here tomorrow at the established time.”

Saiki: “ *I’m sure just a simple ‘yes’ would do* .”

Walter: “Right then, does anyone have any further questions?”

Ena: “Oh, oh! Me, good sir! What exactly will this morning meeting entail?”

L: “I agree. I wish to know what exactly we will be discussing.”

Walter: “If you want to know, I’d like to bring your attention to the third rule: the exploration clause. Using this provided privilege to explore the island, we’re all going to find a way out of here.”

Jesse: “Wait–really? That’s… really what you wanna do?”

Walter: “Of course I do, Jesse. It’s obvious none of us signed up for this. We all have lives to get back to. It’s best for us to leave this island as soon as possible without having to conform to the later rules of this death game.”

Jesse: “Yo, respect for Mr. White!”

Walter: “Not appropriate, Jesse.”

Kaidou: “Why can’t we investigate now? I can hear the nightly winds calling me to their beck and call!”

Hiroshi: “It’s much too late to go outside now, for it is getting dark and closer to the nighttime hours.”

Walter: “And it’s better if everyone gets a decent rest before focusing our attention on this investigation.”

Mai: “Oh, I can bake something sweet for you all in the morning as motivation!”

Latte: “What a wonderful idea, Mai! I’d love to try your baking!”

Hayasaka, who hadn’t spoken up at all thus far, glanced around the group. Most appeared tired, which he could relate to a little too well. As he was looking around, his eyes landed on Brian, who he realised hadn’t spoken a word either. Just then, Brian caught eye-contact with him, and the two awkwardly reverted their sight away from each other. Hayasaka felt his cheeks heat up in embarrassment.

Hayasaka: (“Ah jeeze, hopefully he didn’t think I was staring at him or something…”)

Walter: “Alright then. If we’re all clear, then I expect to see you all here tomorrow at 7A.M.”

Soon enough, everyone began to vacate the restaurant for their rooms. Hayasaka followed Kurumada and Mai up to the second floor, as they bid one another goodnight before splitting into their dorms. Hayasaka attempted to wind down and focus on trying to get some sleep, as well as find some sort of relief in Walter's words. He searched around the room for pajamas, but only ended up finding a spare suit in the closet and nothing more.

Hayasaka: ("Well that's that then. I guess I'll have to make-do with… what I'm wearing right now.")

Sighing, Hayasaka slipped off his blazer, tie and shoes, and mustered what he could of a comfortable position in his bed. During this endeavour, he heard a loud bell ring out from a speaker, and Monotora popped up on a monitor he hadn't quite noticed in his room up until now.

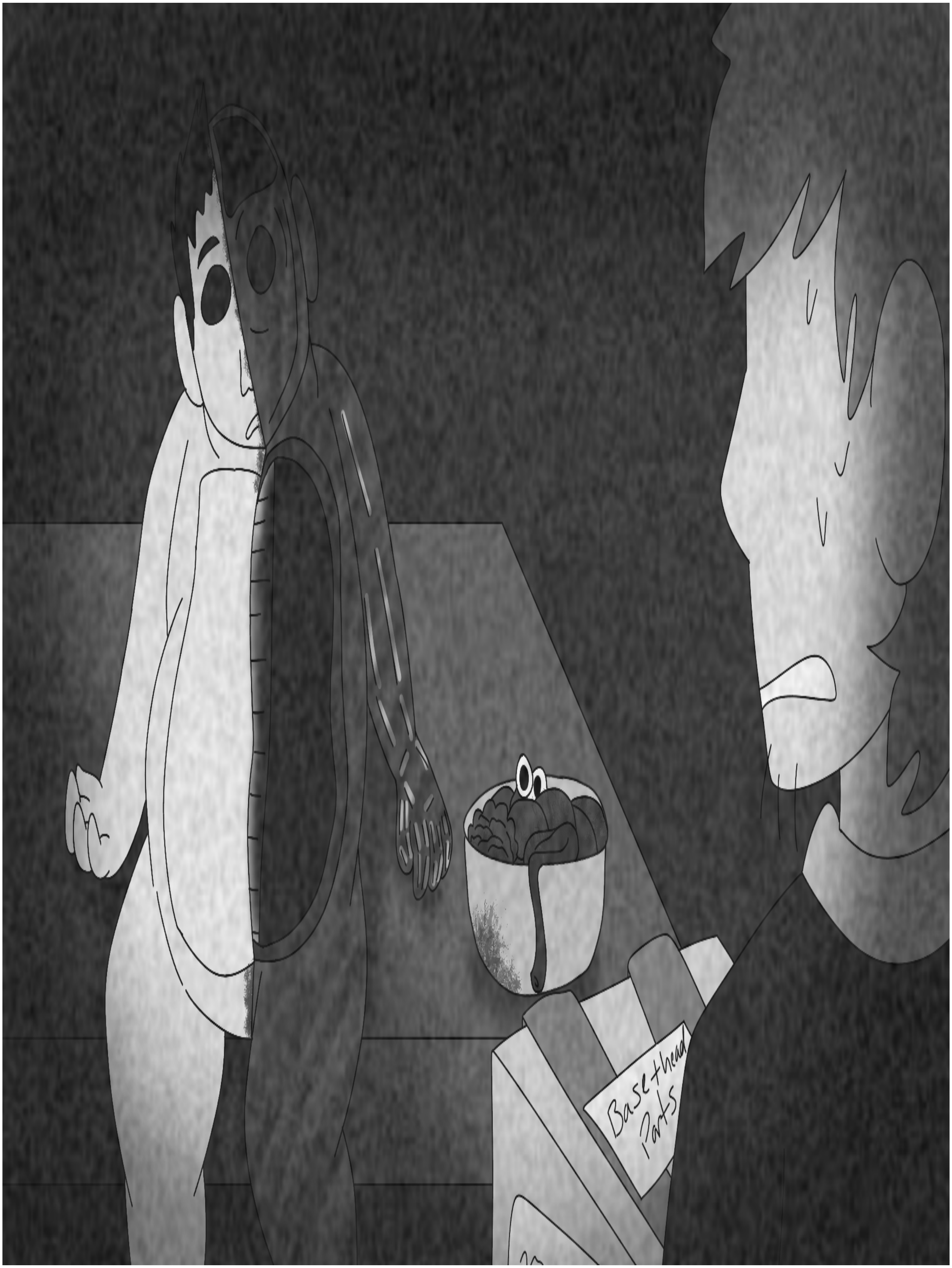
DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "It is now 12A.M., and so the nighttime routine thingy will start. This'll also mean that I'll be roaming around the island, so you better not be out in the dark until 7A.M. Otherwise I'm turning you into a chew toy."

Hayasaka: "..."

Dismissing the morbid announcement, Hayasaka eventually drifted off to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-


Basethead
Parts

???: "Entry one of our company mascot project: We’ve spent the last couple of hours gathering parts to begin production. However, since we’ll be using spare parts from older, unused models, there’s one in particular that seems so out of place unlike the rest. Half of its body has organs and muscles exposed – it’s so realistic for a human model. When the boss found out about this, they seemed so enthusiastic about reusing it’s organs to recreate an even more realistic robot, one that has the ability to eat and bleed, so that it can act like a real animal. A monster… As for the rest of the spare parts, another team will have to repair and polish up the parts that will be used for our mascot: some in particular look like nightmare fuel, like the monsters you see in dreams you wish you never dreamt. We'll just hope things will go smoothly in this production."

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead.”

Hayasaka awoke to the morning announcement greeted by a sadistically cheerful Monotora. He retrieved his glasses from the bedside table, slipping them on before rubbing his temples.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, yes, I remember now… We’re all supposed to meet downstairs at the restaurant. Right then, it’s not like I have any other choice but to go.”)

Quickly preparing himself upon his usual morning routine, Hayasaka left his room, remembering to grab his key before walking out the door. Just then, a loud banging sound erupted from the other side of the hall, halting him into a small jolt.

???: “Yuri, c’mon! We’re gonna be late!”

Hayasaka turned his head to see a pink haired girl knocking impatiently on the furthest hotel room, huffing at the lack of reply. He decided to walk over to her.

Hayasaka: “N-Natsuki? Is everything alright…?” (“I’m not sure why, but I feel compelled to see what’s wrong…”)

Natsuki: “Ugh, Yuri’s being difficult. She’s too scared to come out of her room. I told you, there’s nothing to be worried about, okay?”

Just then, a small whimper of a voice echoed from the aforementioned hotel room.

Yuri: “I-I’m sorry! It’s just… what if a murder has been comitted…?”

Hayasaka: “Yuri, it’s alright. Surely no one would do such a thing, especially on the first night. It sounds a bit ridiculous, right? Haha…”

Natsuki: “Yeah, listen to Hayasaka! I don’t wanna go to the restaurant by myself! Please?”

For a moment, there was only silence. And then, the door was opened, and a frowning Yuri stepped outside.

Yuri: “...You’re right. I-I’m sorry for causing you both such an inconvenience.”

Natsuki: “It’s fine. I’m just glad that you’re alright. I don’t wanna do this if you’re not with me…”

Yuri simply nodded, closing her door quietly.

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I could accompany you both to the restaurant, if it’ll help you feel a little safer…”

Natsuki: “Really? Thanks.”

Yuri: “T-Thank you…”

Hayasaka walked the two girls downstairs to the restaurant. He parted ways with them as they went to sit down at one of the many tables. Looking around, Hayasaka mentally counted the people also currently present: Walter, alongside a tired Jesse who Hayasaka assumed was dragged out of his room by the former, Saiki and Kaidou, Hiroshi, Retsuko and Brian.

Hayasaka: ("No Kurumada or Mai yet. I wonder where they are… Ah well, with the time I have, I'll go make myself a coffee. I haven't survived the mornings without one yet, haha.")

Making his way into the kitchen, Hayasaka bumped into someone who he considered a pleasant surprise.

Mai: "Hayasaka! Good morning! You look like you slept well!"

Hayasaka: "Good morning, Mai… And I doubt that. Oh, are you baking something?"

Mai: "Mhm! I did say yesterday that I would. I just put a dozen or so melon bread buns in the oven – they should be rising to be lovely and fresh as we speak!"

Hayasaka: "You're baking for everyone, I take it?"

Mai: "Well, I'm not so sure if we'll all be provided with any meals, so I wanted to take the liberty of at least giving everyone a proper breakfast for the big task ahead of us today!"

Hayasaka: "Usually it's the hotel who prepares food for their guests, but since this is an atypical island, I suppose we'll just have to make our own breakfasts, huh?"

Mai: "With all the ingredients provided, I see no harm in that!"

Hayasaka: ("Let's just hope no one has access to poison, haha… N-No, I shouldn't be thinking like that, even if it's just a joke.")

Finishing the conversation, Hayasaka went to brew his coffee and walked back out into the restaurant to wait for the remainder of the group to arrive. Taking a sip, he watched a few trickle in.

Latte: "I'm sorry for being so tardy! I was taking a while to get ready."

Ena: “Good morning my good friends! I appear to be late, but that is because I have no concept of time!”

Moony: “You better thank me for dragging their butt here. Wait, do you even have a butt, Ena?”

Kurumada: “G’mornin’, Hayasaka.”

Being the next to enter the restaurant, Kurumada walked over to Hayasaka.

Hayasaka: “Ah, good morning. Any reason why you’re late?”

Kurumada: “On my case already, eh? I was just having an angry mornin’ sesh’ in the sports centre gym. Y’know, to blow off some steam from last night and all.”

Hayasaka: (“No matter what happens, health is always on the forefront of his agenda…”)

A few beats passed, and any chatter died down as someone spoke up.

Walter: “...We’re still missing a few people. How long does it take to get down here when the rooms are just upstairs?”

Jesse: “Heheh, y’think someone’s already bit the dust?”

Yuri: “N-No!”

Natsuki: “Yuri, he’s just joking!”

Retsuko: “It wasn’t the most appropriate joke, though…”

L: “Good morning.”

Walter: “Any discernible reason as to why you’re late?”

L: “I was just investigating something, no need to worry. Oh, is that melon bread I smell?”

Mai: “Hehe, you have a keen nose, Mr. Detective!”

Mai had just walked out of the kitchen, holding a tray of the baked pastries.

Mai: “Come now, everyone, don’t be shy! There’s enough for everyone!”

Walter: “ *Investigating something* … Sure.”

Jesse: “Yo, Mr. White, you gotta try some of this bread shit – it’s damn good. Dunno why it doesn’t taste like melon, though…”

Walter: “And yet, still one more person has refused to show up…”

Eventually, after a little while more waiting, the last person strolled into the restaurant.

Bojack: “Is this the restaurant? Oh, yeah, it is.”

Walter: “So then, any reason you chose to be ridiculously late when we agreed to be here at seven?”

Bojack: “What? I just overslept the announcement. At least I’m here now. Oh shit, is that breakfast?”

Bojack walked over and picked up two melon bread buns from the tray.

Bojack: “What’s this – melon? Doesn’t taste like it at all…”

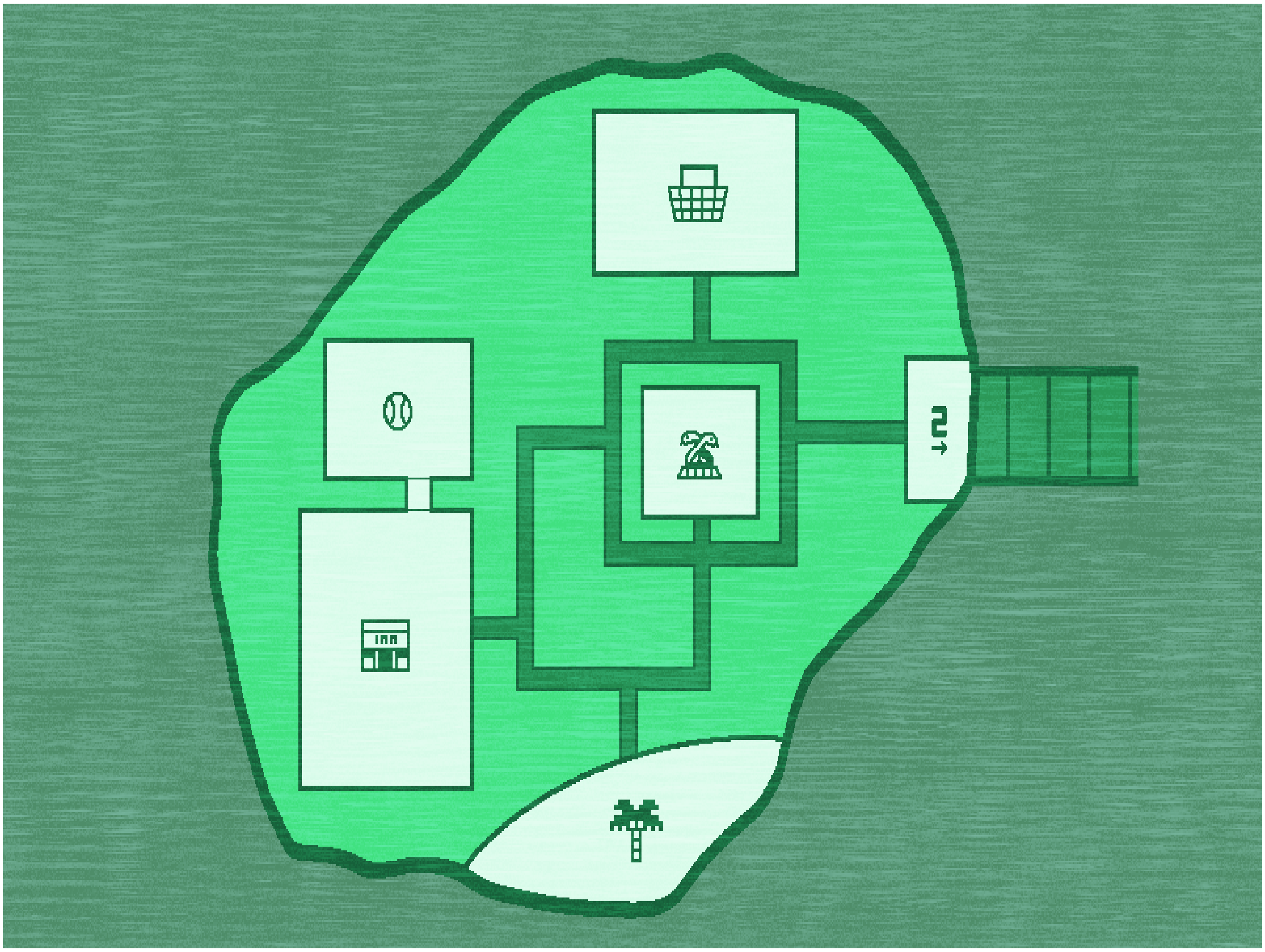
Walter groaned, shaking his head. Adjusting his glasses, he cleared his throat as the group looked towards him once more.

Walter: “Now that we’re all here, *finally* , we can get started. I’ll remind you what I briefly mentioned last night, about the exploration rule. Today, we will be using it to our advantage to investigate the island and find a means of escape.”

Retsuko: “But, this island is pretty big. How will we investigate it all?”

Walter: “Simple: we’ll set off in groups to maximise the amount of ground covered.”

As he spoke, Walter fetched his tablet from his pocket, and displayed the island map for everyone to see.



Walter: “We’ll be investigating the supermarket, beach, park, and the outskirts of the island. Who explores where doesn’t matter.”

Kurumada: “In that case, I’m takin’ Hayasaka and Mai no matter what. We’ll go for the outskirts – it’ll give us a good walk at least.”

Mai: “Oh, how about Latte joins us as well? It’ll make an even team then!”

Latte: “Aw, how considerate of you to invite me along, Mai!”

Kurumada: “...If ya insist.”

Hayasaka: (“Latte seems nice so far. I don’t mind her being part of our search group, despite the face Kurumada’s making…”)

Natsuki: “Me and Yuri are staying together. But, I don’t wanna be grouped with two guys in case something bad happens…”

Retsuko: “Then I could accompany you two, I don’t mind!”

Ena: “I will join your party! Oh, no, what am I saying? I hate parties!”

Moony: “They mean we’ll join you…”

Natsuki: “Let’s look in the supermarket – it’s the coolest place after all.”

Yuri: “G-Good thinking…”

Kaidou: “Aha! You two – Hiroshi and L – appear to be strong candidates for my ultimate team! Come, alongside Saiki and I, we will search the dangerous beach far and wide for our means of escape from this prison of despair!”

Hiroshi: “I wish not to decline your offer, therefore I don’t mind joining you.”

L: “This’ll be interesting, indeed…”

Saiki: “...”

Walter: “...Well then, that leaves me, Jesse, Bojack and Brian to take the park. Considering that it’s has been the only place ‘Monotora’ has been seen active so far, I find this outcome useful.”

Bojack: “Eh. Guess I don’t mind. Wasn’t expecting to be picked anyway. It’s not like my ego could be hurt at this point.”

Brian: “I-I guess that’s okay…”

Jesse: “Don’t worry, yo. We’re gonna make a bomb-ass team.”

With the groups decided, everyone split up to explore their designated areas. The ‘island outskirts’ group began to wander around the outside of the island: Kurumada in the lead, Hayasaka tagging closely behind, and Mai and Latte slowly catching up a few ways back, chatting to each other about this and that. With only the digestive sounds of the ocean filling his ears, Hayasaka couldn’t help but listen in.

Mai: “So, Latte, tell me about your skin condition again. I want to make sure I understand what you mentioned before.”

Latte: “Ah, you see, my skin can crumble in very hot or wet conditions. It may sound a little frustrating, but I was accommodated back in Earthbread very well!”

Mai: “You poor thing! Perhaps we should go look for a sun umbrella and high FPS sunscreen from the supermarket later on?”

Kurumada: “Focus, would you? We ain’t here to be chummy with each other.”

Mai: “In my defence, we’ve hardly found a clue at all. Do you see anything other than sea and sand out here?”

Hayasaka: (“Mai is right. I don’t think we’ve come across anything worth noting ye…”)

Hayasaka looked down as he felt something hard against his shoe. Taking his foot off of what he stepped on, he immediately jumped back.

Hayasaka: “A-AH!”

Kurumada: “What?!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I don’t–I-Is that a… *skull* ?”

Latte: “A skull?!”

Mai: “Oh dear. It’s rather small, isn’t it? It possibly can’t be a person then. Maybe an animal?”

Kurumada: “Ya think it was the tiger’s doin’?”

Latte: “Oh my, do you think they’re still around then?”

Hayasaka: “I doubt that. According to the rules, Monotora only roams around freely during the nighttime hours. So I believe we’re safe at least, haha…”

Kurumada: “Damn bastard tryin’ to scare us… C’mon, let’s get outta here.”

Kurumada ushered the three out of the area and the group continued to search as normal. Soon, they came across a large bridge, blocked off from venturing to the other side.

Kurumada: “I wonder what the hell this is…”

Hayasaka: “Hm, p-perhaps it may lead to another island?”

Mai: “I wonder how many there are… How exciting!”

Latte: “Oh, I know! Maybe the people from the Nesos company are on the other side of this bridge.”

Kurumada: “Yeah? Well, I wonder how I’ll tear down this gate to get to ‘em…”

Monotora: “Ah, ah, ah! You can’t go through here just yet! Kehe!”

Hayasaka: “Ah–!”

Latte: “M-Monotora…?”

Kurumada: “You have some real fuckin’ nerve showing *your* face again…”

Monotora: “Oh, I do love a warm welcome from my prey!”

Mai: “Hang on a moment. What did you mean by ‘yet’?”

Monotora: “Hehe, you’ll just have to find out soon…”

Kurumada: “An’ what about that skull we found lyin’ about the island? Got an explanation for that?”

Monotora: “Looks like you found my last meal! You see, I pounce on unfortunate animals who still reside on this pathetic island. It quenches my lust for blood, when I can’t chow down on my new sixteen-course meal just yet! Ahaha!”

Hayasaka: “ *Ah…* ”

Kurumada: “Argh–get lost, will ya?!

Monotora: “Eh, you creatures are so strange. You ask for an explanation, and when I hand it over, you just act all angry about it. Too damn complicated!”

Monotora then pounced off, Hayasaka watching as they hid into the winding trees.

Hayasaka: (“That was the first time we’ve seen Monotora since our initial meeting with them… T-They’re a lot more intimidating when I’m only with a few people. God forbid they catch me when I’m alone.”)

Mai: “...Hmph. Such an unruly animal.”

Latte: “I guess we should keep going now. Let’s not get too off track here – we have a little more to investigate, so let’s not lose our motivation!”

Kurumada: “As long as we don't run into that bastard again…”

The four kept trekking around the island until they became tired of seeing only sand and the endless horizon of the sea. And so, they decided to head back to the restaurant. Luckily, they had just made it in time to see everyone else had returned too, Walter giving them a curt nod as he cleared his throat and stood up.

Walter: “Right then – I’m glad we all made it back at a reasonable time. I expect there must be something we all found, so I would like to hear a report of each group’s findings. In the meantime, I’ll go first: at the park, we found that the bodies were still present. It turns out that they all died in a similar fashion, that is, being mauled. I assume this was the tiger’s doing.”

Yuri: “O-Oh dear…”

Natsuki: “God, that’s so nasty. Why were we even shown that in the first place?”

Jesse: “Yeah, for real. They act like a totally wild animal – kinda reminds me of Tuco a ‘lil.”

Brian: “U-Um, I walked further into the park, and I found out that there’s a small area with a swing set. It’s a little odd for a company to have something like that, right?”

Kurumada: “What do they take us for? Kids or some shit?”

Hayasaka: “M-Maybe it’s for recreational purposes? Haha…”

Natsuki: “It’s not like *I’d* ever use it.”

Kaidou: “Yeah, me neither! I would never think to use something so childish!”

Saiki: “ *I saw you playing at a park last week, Kaidou* .”

Kaidou: “T-That was only because my brother wanted to go! I swear!”

Jesse: “So, uh, Bojack. What did you find again? I hardly saw you when we were lookin’ around.”

Bojack: “Wait, was I supposed to be looking for something?”

Walter: “What are you talking about? This was the whole *point* of the task.”

Bojack: “Oh. Well I kinda just sat at the fountain. You can’t strain an actor, you know? Wait, but I do remember when the tiger showed up to shoo us off to clean up the bodies. See? Now you can’t be mad at me because I did what you wanted.”

L: “You saw Monotora…?”

Yuri: “M-My group did too…!”

Natsuki: “Yeah, we did. When me and Yuri were looking around the supermarket, we were wondering out loud about what would happen if we ate all the food. And then, they popped out from, like, *nowhere* and explained that the supermarket restocks food in the ‘event of a lack of essentials’.”

Yuri: “It really felt as if they appeared from out of nowhere. I couldn’t hear any footsteps approaching us…”

Hayasaka: (“That’s similar to how Monotora just appeared for us…”)

Retsuko: “Oh, if we’re talking about what we found at the supermarket now, then me and Ena found a whole bunch of items like beachwear and surfboards. We also found tape, rope and even some fishing gear. It looks like this store has basically everything, haha.”

Ena: “There was also the presence of many, many sharp pointy objects! Very shiny! And metally!”

Hiroshi: “Sharp objects?”

Latte: “Oh dear, you don’t mean…?”

Moony: “Can it, will you? It was just tools.”

Natsuki: “Still, shouldn’t we do anything about them? It’s kinda dangerous to leave them lying about for anyone to take.”

Walter: “You have a point. I’ll look into it.”

Kurumada: “Alright then, if ya done with that report, I’ll move it on to my group. We didn’t find anythin’ beyond the island other than ocean, so unless you’re an olympic swimmer with insane stamina, there’s not much ground to say we can go and look for help that way.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but, we also found a bri–”

Mai: “Oh, girls, did you ever find any sunscreen in the supermarket?”

Retsuko: “Oh, I think I did!”

Kurumada: “Mai, what the hell?! Why’re you askin’ this right now?”

Mai: “I simply forgot to earlier. Don’t you remember what Latte said about her skin condition? I don’t want her skin to suffer on this island, you know?”

Kurumada: “Argh…”

Latte: “Aw, Mai, it’s alright, really! We can deal with that later, haha. Let’s get back to the report: we also found a bridge, but it was blocked off by a gate. That was when we saw Monotora, too. They said it’d only open once something were to happen, apparently.”

L: “Interesting… Hm, perhaps the ‘something’ they were referring to was linked to murder? It is the only condition that has been presented to us thus far.”

Kurumada: “Oh, great. What is this now? Some kinda present for killing?”

Ena: “This is not the equivalent exchange of the auction!”

Walter: “Calm down. I assure you that we’ll never see the other side of that bridge once we escape from this island. Right then, the only group we haven’t heard from yet is the ones who investigated the beach. Care to tell us what you found?”

Kaidou: “Hehe… I thought you’d never ask. Although, I suppose saving the best for last is how the hero always works, right? There we were, first steps onto the grains of what would be our final mission… The winds beckoned for us to flee, but I was no coward. I would complete my task, no matter what fate would throw at me! For I am–”

Kurumada: “Cut the monloguein’, kid! Just tell us what ya found!”

Kaidou: “A-Ah, um… W-We didn’t find much at all, actually…”

Hayasaka: (“Then what was he expecting to say with such a lengthy start?”)

L: “Yes. Apart from a few deck chairs and island flora, there wasn’t much of note. However, I did happen to stumble upon a few bones that belonged to a dead animal.”

Bojack: “You didn’t find it by stepping on it, right? Because, I mean, you have no shoes on. Why *don’t* you have shoes on? I just realised that. That’s weird.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, w-we found something similar to that as well.”

Mai: “Oh, it was that animal skull, wasn’t it? We thought it was Monotora’s doing.”

L: “I suspected as much, too. I suppose Monotora has already been feasting on the first night already.”

Hiroshi: “It was most likely an island mouse, as I happened to check over the bones myself. Perhaps Monotora feeds on small rodents to quench themselves? Although, I’m unsure why, as I didn’t know a robot would need sustenance. Furthermore, I was able to identify a few of the plants growing around, such as hibiscuses, orchids and coconut palms.”

Kaidou: “Whoa, that’s so cool, Hiroshi! I didn’t know you knew so much stuff! I wonder why you didn’t mention any of this to your *leader* earlier…”

Natsuki: “That was probably why…”

Walter: “Alright, well, now after hearing the reports, I believe I’ve come to an idea.”

Jesse: “Ah, yeah, yeah. I get you, Mr. White, heheh. We’re gonna write an S.O.S. message at the beach, right?”

Walter: “What? *No* , Jesse. *We’re going to build a boat* .”

Hayasaka: (“A… boat?”)

Retsuko: “Erm, what do you mean by that?”

Walter: “From hearing the types of materials and tools available to us, we should have enough resources to construct a boat, and use it to leave the island.”

Bojack: “Are you serious, or has the old man syndrome finally caught up with you? A boat? No thank you. I think I’ve had enough with boats for one lifetime.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, I mean, I really doubt we could make something like that. I don’t know how to do that, and I don’t think anyone else knows either.”

Kurumada: “S’not just that. C’mon, a boat made outta what? Wood? Like that’s gonna go anywhere but the bottom of the damn ocean.”

Jesse: “Aw, unclench, yo. Mr. White’s ideas aren’t random. You can trust him. Once, he made a damn car battery outta sponges and nickels and shit!”

Kaidou: “Actually, I’ve built a boat before! Me and my friends were also in a similar situation on an island, and we were forced to survive a native life for the rest of our lives or find a way to escape! It wasn’t that hard, especially under my watchful eye, hehe…”

Saiki: “ *Most of the manual labour was done by the other guys. You hardly did anything.* ”

Latte: “Well, I believe it’s a plausible idea! Anything’s possible as long as you put your mind to it!”

Brian: “I-I guess it’s not the worst idea ever, right?”

Ena: “Oooh, how exciting! I have no idea what a boat is!”

Mai: “Then let’s do it~!”

Walter: “Good. It didn’t take too long to convince you all. Well then, since I was the one to propose the idea, I’ll be in charge of designing the boat, as well as overseeing the final product, unless anyone has any objections.”

No one spoke up. Walter nodded with a noise of affirment.

Walter: “The rest of you then will be helping out to build the boat. Jesse, you can be my assistant. I need someone to make sure everyone stays on task.”

Jesse: “Hell yeah!”

Walter: “...I’ll design the boat tonight. That way, we can begin production early tomorrow to maximise efficiency.”

L: “That’s going to be quite the problem.”

Everyone, including Hayasaka, turned to look at L, who was perched on a chair and sipping on a hot cup of tea.

Walter: “Excuse me? And why’s that?”

L: “While it’s entirely within reason to construct a boat from scratch, I hope you haven’t forgotten that we’re being constantly monitored 24/7 by those surveillance cameras placed everywhere. And, if we are being watch by this so-called ‘company’, then they will put a stop this boat plan of yours as it goes against their ‘murder to escape the island’ condition. Furthermore, Walter, where will the construction of this boat take place?”

Walter: “Well, the beach, obviously. It’s a large and open space, and we won’t have to manually transport the boat to the ocean when we set sail.”

L: “I figured as much. That only means Monotora will most likely be set to destroy the boat during the nighttime hours.”

Bojack: “Looks like our plan is ruined then. It was fun while it lasted.”

Kurumada: “Not if we stop the bastard ourselves.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, w-what’re you talking about?”

Mai: “Kurumada! Your muscles are as thick as your brain! Don’t you remember what Monotora is capable of? *You* were the one to pick a fight with them, so you should know first hand how dangerous they are.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, you’re right. But, it’s only ‘cuz I didn’t know how strong they really were. Now, I *know* I can beat ‘em for sure.”

Hayasaka: “Y-You’re not serious, are you? It seems far too risky to me…”

Kurumada: “Well, is anyone else willing to join me?”

A few beats of silence passed. Kurumada crossed his arms and shrugged.

Walter: “...A distraction group *could* come in handy, whether it’s to weaken or simply divert the tiger’s attention.”

Jesse: “So what’s the deal with you, then? You against Mr. White’s idea or somethin’?”

L: “Of course not. I hope to be saved a middle seat when we set off. I don’t fancy witnessing someone be sea sick beside me.”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “It is now 12A.M., and so the nighttime routine thingy will start. This'll also mean that I'll be roaming around the island, so you better not be out in the dark until 7A.M. Otherwise I'm turning you into a chew toy.”

Walter shook his head as the nearby monitor screen finally switched off.

Walter: “Look, the teams will be settled in the morning. Let’s end the meeting here. For now, I want you all to head to bed so we’ll be prepared for tomorrow.”

Following his orders, the group began to leave the restaurant for their rooms, most appearing tired from today’s endeavours and ready to call it a night. On their way to their rooms, Hayasaka stopped Kurumada for a moment.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, you’re not really going to try and go against Monotora again, are you?”

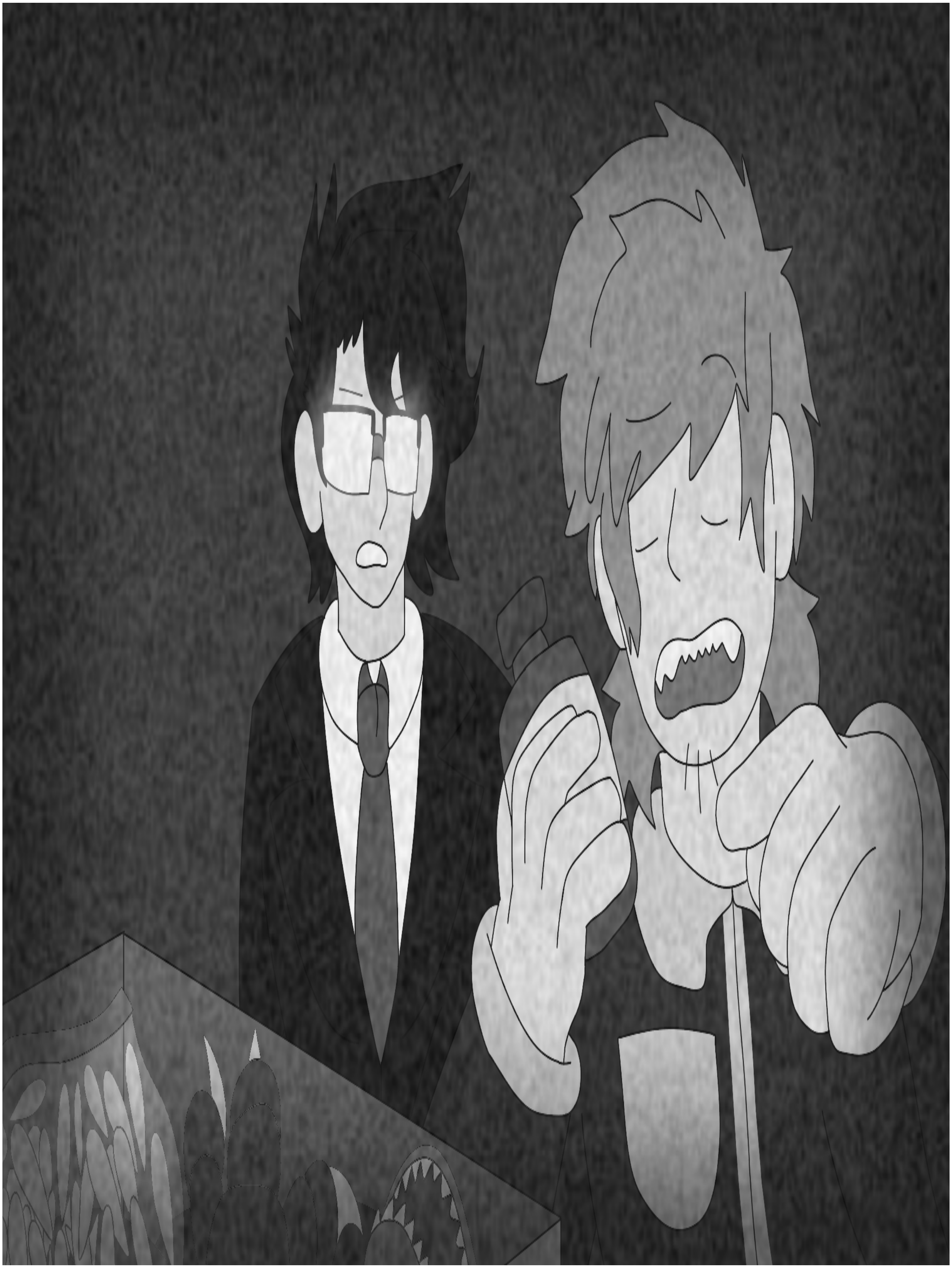
Kurumada: “Look, I’ll be fine. I just gotta get myself a lil’ more prepared to square up to ‘em, that’s all. Hell, it won’t be all that bad if I got a team with me, right?”

Only barely assured, Hayasaka nodded. The two then exchanged goodnights and went into their separate rooms.

Hayasaka: ("This boat plan… If I have to be honest, it's a little absurd. But, if Walter thinks we can do it, then there's no harm in trying, right? Still, I wonder how helpful I'll be. I'm not much of the heavy labour type: my hands are only strong enough to use a keyboard, haha… But, if it works, and it allows us to go home, then I'll just have to try my best with what I can manage.")

Hayasaka, feeling a mixture of relief and overwhelming fatigue, decided to turn in for the night.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???:"Entry two of our company mascot project: currently, spare parts that were gathered a while ago have been repaired and repolished. However during the start of construction, the base for this robot has required much more materials than we anticipated. Due to this small occupation, our boss has been rather *unhappy* with the small delay. They've gotten so upset with the current outcome that they forced other workers to go out and get more. However, the ones that came back empty handed were killed. These new parts they gathered are so… creepy, with the giant claws, huge teeth… It came with a few things too like… liquid in a bottle? Whatever it is, they said all these extra parts can ‘give the thing an advantage in skirmishes’. But clearly the boss doesn't know anything about programming a highly intelligent AI, and testing if it can function in different conditions and so on. It's just ridiculous. But if we don't follow orders, they'll get rid of us for good. We don't have much of a choice other than to follow what the boss says… unfortunately.”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead.”

Being awoken by the morning announcement a second time, Hayasaka slowly got himself out of bed and went to get ready. Before he could even touch the handle to leave, however, he heard a knock from the other side of the door.

Hayasaka: (“I wonder who that could be… It felt far too soft for it to be Kurumada, but it’s not just that. It sounded like the noise came from down below…?”)

When Hayasaka opened his door, he was stumped to see no one there.

???: “Down here.”

Hayasaka peered down.

Hayasaka: “O-Oh, Retsuko! I’m so sorry for not seeing you there, haha…”

Retsuko: “It’s okay. Since you’re all so taller than me, I’ve kinda expected this to happen.”

Hayasaka: “Is there something you need?”

Retsuko: “Ah, yes! Hayasaka, would you like to have a coffee with me? I thought I’d keep up proper ‘office etiquette’, as only you would understand what that really meant, haha.”

Hayasaka: “R-Really? Well, I can’t refuse such a kind offer. Oh, but, did you also happen to ask Brian on your way here too? He appears to be from some sort of office firm as well.”

Retsuko: “About that… I *did* knock on his door, but there was no answer. I guess he was too shy to open up, huh? If only he knew it was just little ol’ me.”

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“I don’t blame Brian. We both share a worrisome nature, but he must have it worse considering he doesn’t have anyone to rely on…”)

Hayasaka then left for the restaurant alongside Retsuko, spotting Mai busying herself in the kitchen once again.

Mai: “Good morning, Hayasaka! Oh, and Retsuko too! Are you two friends now? Hehe.”

Hayasaka: “Just two co-workers having a drink together. I-It’s nothing special, really.”

Retsuko: “Mai, don’t tell me you plan to bake for everyone every day? I wouldn’t want to rely on you to the point where you feel a large responsibility on your shoulders!”

Mai: “Oh, no! There’s nothing to worry about: I’m not planning on baking forever, especially if we’re going to be leaving the island soon with this boat. Although, in the meantime, I *do* plan to bake for Hayasaka, Kurumada and Latte regardless~.”

Mai winked playfully when referring to the latter, causing Hayasaka to raise a brow but shake it off. He then moved to brew him and Retsuko their coffees, watching as a certain horse strolled in and began to scour the place for something as he handed her a mug.

Retsuko: “Bojack, what’re you looking for?”

Bojack: “Got any vodka in here? Or scotch? Actually, that’s a little strong. Well I mean, it’s not like I won’t drink it if I find it.”

Retsuko: “Should you really be drinking in the morning?”

Bojack: “It’s just a boost. You know, to get me through the day. When do you drink then?”

Retsuko: “Hum, usually it’s after a super stressful work day, or when I’m invited out by a friend group.”

Bojack: “And it’s the same for you?”

Hayasaka: “U-Um, no. I don’t drink, actually.”

Bojack: “ *Really* ? Well, uh, that’s good. For you.”

Bojack nodded, picking up a large bottle and leaving with it in hand.

Retsuko: “So you really don’t drink? Even after a hard day at work?”

Hayasaka: “No, not really. It’s never been my thing, haha…”

The two then continued to drink in a tranquil state, lightly chatting about nothing in particular. After he and Retsuko had finished them off, they parted ways into the restaurant. He soon spotted Kurumada arrive, and walked up to him.

Hayasaka: “Good morning, Kurumada. I assume you went to the sports centre again.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, yeah, caught red handed, huh? I’m gonna be there more frequently, that’s all.”

Hayasaka: (“Does he mean because of last night? God, I really don’t want him going through with this…”)

Walter: “Everyone, gather round. We’re starting the meeting now.”

Pushing down his concerned thoughts, Hayasaka turned around so he could focus his attention on Walter.

Walter: “I hope everyone’s had a decent rest as there’s no time to waste today. I finalised the blueprints of the boat last night, so we can get to assigning the teams right away.”

Kaidou: “Kehe, actually, there’s no need for that.”

Kaidou stepped forward, an aura of overconfidence surrounding him as he raised a closed fist.

Kaidou: “I have generously offered only a fraction of my power to put forth the ultimate battle team to assemble against the fearsome Monotora!”

Jesse: “Uh, what the hell are you talkin’ about?”

Kaidou: “I introduce you all to the Jet Black Wings’ warriors in command!”

Hayasaka: ("...How long have they been practising those poses for?")

Kaidou: "I, of course, am the fearless leader, alongside Latte the magic wielder, Hiroshi the brains, and Ena the… uh, wild card."

Ena: "I am but a card, the randomness of cards! Perhaps I am the ace of spades, or the king of hearts! Only the dealt hand will tell!"

Moony: "I can't believe you twisted that into a compliment…"

Jesse: "Oh my god! Haha! You just made a goddamn RPG team, didn't you? Oh, this is priceless. Fuckin' priceless, yo."

Saiki: " *I told him someone would point it out* …"

Mai: "Ah, Latte. I wouldn't have expected you to join… such a team."

Latte: "Oh, I'm simply doing this for Kaidou! He's a student after all, and so I want to make him happy and boost his confidence! It's healthy for young people's imagination to run wild!"

Hayasaka: ("A little *too* wild, if you ask me…")

Natsuki: "And why did you join, Hiroshi? You seemed kinda down to earth to me."

Hiroshi: "Do not misunderstand my intentions. Kaidou begged me to join his team when Saiki had rejected him."

Saiki: "..."

Kaidou: “OK, w-while there were a few, erm, *mishaps* along the way, everything’s fine now! We’re everyone’s best bet at taking Monotora down, anyway! Heheh.”

Bojack: “Great. So we’re doomed.”

Kaidou: “Oh, but don’t move on just yet! There’s actually one more member that needs to be–”

Kurumada: “Yeah, no way that’s ever fuckin’ happening.”

Kaidou: “Huh?! W-Why not? You said you were gonna go against Monotora, and we are too! It only makes sense that we join forces and team up!”

Kurumada: “And what makes you think I’m ‘teamin’ up’ with a bunch of delusional idiots? Y’know, forget what I said last time. I’m workin’ strictly *alone* .”

Latte: “Oh, Kurumada, not even for Kaidou’s sake?”

Ena: “The muscle man has made up his mind! A mind where we are not in it… Oh, boo hoo.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Walter: “...Continuing on, I will allow your group to take on the role of the distraction. As for the rest of you, you will be assigned to the boat production, and should meet with me and Jesse at the beach to start on construction immediately. Any further questions?”

Taking the further silence as a no, Walter nodded, and began to leave for the beach with Jesse not far behind. The two groups began to split off, leaving Hayasaka standing still with tense shoulders, a thought crawling in his mind for a moment before he sucked in a breath and sped-walked to catch up with Walter. Tapping him on the shoulder, the man turned around with a furrowed brow.

Walter: “Yes, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m sorry to stop you for a moment, but I have a request to make. May I be allowed to watch over Kurumada while he trains to, um, ‘distract’ Monotora? I have a feeling that he may try something dangerous if he were to be left alone, ever since his ongoing hatred towards them. I-I’m just worried, is all…”

Walter: “Hm… I suppose it would be bad news if he did try something before the boat was anywhere close to being completed. And, I do have just enough people working on the boat, so I can let this one instance slide.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, t-thank you.”

As Walter walked away, Hayasaka finally let go of the breath he had been so diligently holding, mouthing a ‘thank god’ and adjusting his tie.

Hayasaka: (“Now, I should go and find Kurumada. I suspect he’s gone to the sports centre…”)

Upon arriving at the sports centre, however, Hayasaka caught witness to an unexpected scene.

Kurumada: “Aw, come the hell on! Are ya jokin’ with me here?!

Kaidou: “N-No! I was planning to use this place this whole time! It’s the perfect place to train my warriors!”

Kurumada: “ *Warriors* ?! Are you even listenin’ to yourself, kid?”

Hayasaka lingered in the doorway, unsure if he should interfere as he watched the argument continue.

Latte: “I don’t see why we can’t just share the space. There’s plenty of it, and we have no intention of getting in your way.”

Kurumada: “That ain’t the damn point. I’m just gonna get distracted by whatever childish game you’re gonna get up to.”

Kaidou: “Please, Kurumada! Why won’t you join us? I understand we’re not as strong as you, but that’s why we want your help!”

Kurumada: “Huh…?”

Kaidou: “You were so brave when you squared up to Monotora like that on the first night without any hesitation at all! There’s no way any of us could’ve done what you did–w-well, I would’ve, but exposing my powers would’ve be too risky when we were all in such a big crowd!”

Hiroshi: “Yes, your strength is rather commendable. Someone like you is definitely not to be made a fool of.”

Latte: “I do have to admit, you have the potential to protect a lot of people in the group. It’ll inspire confidence in the more worried ones if you were to show them that you’re on their side!”

Ena: “Yes! Yes! Three cheers for the muscle man! Hip hip–!”

Moony: “We get it already!”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: (“W-Wow, I’m surprised to hear that’s what they really think of him, haha…”)

Kurumada: “...What I did wasn’t bravery. It was *recklessness* .”

Kaidou: “K-Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “You can keep the sports centre. I’m gonna train someplace else…”

Kaidou: “Wait–!”

Kurumada trudged out of the sports centre, until he bumped into Hayasaka, who looked up at him with a small smile resting upon his lips.

Hayasaka: “...What you said was very honest of you.”

Kurumada: “Uh–that’s… G-Goddamnit! Just forget about what happened, alright?! How long have you been standin’ there for, anyway?”

Hayasaka: “Um, ah, just a little while. I’m actually here because I volunteered to keep an eye on you. I’m just–...I just wanted to make sure you won’t do anything silly…”

Kurumada: “...You’re that worried about me, huh?”

Kurumada flicked his eyes to the floor for a second, then smirked.

Kurumada: “Heh, guess I don’t mind you watchin’ me outta all people, at least.”

Hayasaka raised a brow, but eventually shook his head.

Hayasaka: “Well, you made your case clear that you don’t want to train here, so why don’t we try the beach? It’s quite the open space after all.”

Kurumada: “Sure, sounds good to me.”

The two then headed towards the beach where they saw the ‘boat production’ group come into clearing. From what was currently happening, Hayasaka assumed everyone had been instructed by Walter to collect wood and saw into palm logs. A lot was going on at once for such a small group, almost overwhelming him from it all.

Mai: “Hello, guys! What’re you two doing here?”

Kurumada: “Try’na find somewhere quiet to train. Apparently this place is already a bust.”

Hayasaka: “Mai, what’re you contributing to the group exactly?”

Mai: “Oh, I volunteered to provide everyone with refreshments when things get really tough! I don’t wish to get my hands dirty, you see.”

Hayasaka: (“But you’re the only one here wearing gloves…”)

Yuri: “U-Um, I overheard you saying you wanted to find somewhere quiet. Perhaps you could try the park? Since the b-bodies are gone now, it should be pleasant enough…”

Kurumada: “It’s better than gettin’ sand between my fingers. C’mon, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Thank you for the suggestion, Yuri.”

Wasting no time loitering around, Kurumada and Hayasaka left the beach for the park. There, Hayasaka took a seat on the fountain’s edge as Kurumada began to warm himself up with some reps.

Hayasaka: (“I’m unsure if I’ve ever seen Kurumada exercise before… A-Actually, aside from a few exceptions, I haven’t really seen his active side all that much…”)

Kurumada: “...Hayasaka, I ain’t gonna try n’ challenge Monotora, alright?”

Hayasaka: “W-What?”

Kurumada: “You’ve been watchin’ me for a while now. Ain’t ya bored by now? I’d rather you go and find something to do – talk to some people, for example. Yeah, you should go socialise and check up on the group. It’d help ya come outta your comfort zone if ya did.”

Hayasaka: “I don’t know… I mean, who should I even talk to?”

Kurumada: “Anyone! Someone you fancy the vibe of, or someone completely random! Doesn’t matter as long as you’re puttin’ yourself out there.”

Hayasaka: “...And you promise you won’t do anything while I’m gone?”

Kurumada: “I swear. I’m gonna be here the whole time doin’ my stuff. Just go relax for God’s sake.”

Hayasaka: “A-Alright. I suppose so…”

Standing up to leave, Hayasaka waved to Kurumada as he gradually made his way out of the park.

Hayasaka: (“The only thing I can do is trust Kurumada’s word on this…”) “Then again, how am I supposed to start a conversation with ‘anyone’? I’ve never been the type for small talk, haha…”

Monotora: “Hey, hey! I’ve heard your pleas! Why don’t you try giving presents?”

Hayasaka: “J-Jesus…!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! It’s like you’ve seen a four-foot-five tiger pounce up to your feet or something! Oh wait: you have!”

Hayasaka: (“M-Monotora is right in front of me. Kurumada is back in the park, but I’m afraid if I run off they’ll try and chase after me… I just have to remain calm.”) “...P-Presents? What do you mean by presents?”

Monotora: “Is that brain of yours finally gettin’ back on topic? Yes, don’t make me repeat myself! If I have to repeat myself I’ll get so fuckin’ pissed off I’ll rip your goddamn lungs out for wasting the oxygen on asking such a stupid question.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Monotora: “ *Anywho* , giving a gift to someone is always a good conversation starter. It always helps the other person know that you would like to speak with them. For example, if I were to be given a severed juicy arm, I’d speak to ya for hours on end! Haha!”

Hayasaka: “U-Urk… So, um, where do I get these presents from?”

Monotora: “There’s a nifty lil’ machine in the hotel that dispenses all types of presents, or so I’m told… Perhaps you’ve walked by it a few times?”

Hayasaka: (“Now that they mention it, I do believe I spotted something like that, but I hardly paid much attention to it back then…”)

Monotora: “But! You can’t just get whatever whenever! You’re gonna need some monocoins to access it’s prizes.”

Hayasaka: “Monocoins? What are…–Ah!”

Without warning, Monotora threw a few bronze coins at Hayasaka, who scurried to pick them up from the ground and study them.

Monotora: “ *Those* , ahaha!”

Hayasaka: “And why are you giving them to me so suddenly…?”

Monotora: "'Cuz I'm damn bored! And seein' your pathetic face right now really has me feelin' a lot better! Call this a freebie for a pathetically anxious prey! Anyway, if you run out of those, you'll have to look around for more hidden all over the island. Maybe we'll run into each other that way? I wonder what we'll do then, hehe…"

Before Hayasaka could get another word in, Monotora had dashed off into the trees. Now alone, and apparently safe, he restrained himself from falling to the floor from his weak knees.

Hayasaka: ("...Well, now that I have these, it can't hurt to try out that machine. Looks like I don't have an excuse not to try and talk to someone. So, I guess I'll give it a shot?")

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Ena in the sports centre.

Ena: "There appears to be no exit signs around. Must I really present a blood sample like they had requested before?"

Hayasaka: "Hello, Ena. Would you… um, perhaps like to talk for a while?"

Ena: "Mr. Hayasaka! You have appeared from the depths of your awakening to venture to my realm! In haste, we will converse until the specified time depletes into the negatives!"

Hayasaka spent some time with Ena. Very unsure what they would like, he gifted them an hourglass.

Ena: "My oh my! Now what is this nifty contraption? Wait, do not prompt me! It is an hourglass!"

Hayasaka: "Y-Yes, haha… Perhaps someone like you would collect something like this?"

Ena: "Collect? But I have no pockets to bare. Oh no, I am so sorry for my inconvenience!"

Moony: “Just take the damn present, you bobblehead.”

Hayasaka: (“I think they liked it?”)

Ena: “Ah, what a fine day it is where we are currently situated… Where we are… Um…”

Hayasaka: “An island…? Did you not know what this place was called?”

Ena: “Inconceivable!”

Not dissimilar to previous times, Ena’s face shifted to half-white.

Ena: “I don’t understand anything! What is it all you seem to know? Why don’t you aim your hatred at me already! Finish me off you coward!”

Hayasaka: “H-Hey! Ah… C-Calm down. There’s probably not a lot of things I don’t understand about where you come from, right?”

Ena: “Ah–”

Ena jumped back up to normal.

Ena: “You are saying you do not hold auctions where you are from?”

Hayasaka: “Auctions? Oh, yes, we have auctions. Why?” (“Out of everything… *that’s* something we have in common? How strange.”)

Ena: “Me and my best companion, Moony, frequent so many whimsical auctions!”

Moony: “The people always there are so ugly. Get the hint, if you know what I’m saying.”

Ena: “Ah! But remember the one ruined by that rainrock! Oh, it was a terrible tragedy to spell!”

Hayasaka: “R-Rainrock? What’s that?”

Ena: “So you are unfamiliar? The rainrock is akin to a regular raincloud but instead of water, it is rock. I bet you were not expecting that!”

Moony: “Sometimes the rocks can crush people. No big deal when it cleans up the uglies.”

Hayasaka: (“ *Crush* ?! G-Goodness… That’s a little unnerving.”)

Ena: “Alas! It was all well in the end for me and Moony. For you see, I managed to retrieve the dog inside the hourglass. We didn’t even have to pay one fatty catty!”

Hayasaka: “Oh, that’s, um, nice?” (“I’m going to be honest, I’ve completely lost track on what Ena is even talking about. I assume it’s just one of the many travels they’ve been on.”)

Ena: “Good, good! I believe this talk has been what you have desired, Mr. Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose so…?”

Ena: “Magnificent! I am happy to hear you suppose!”

Moony: “Hehe, he’s completely out of it.”

Hayasaka: (“I’m not sure if Moony has noticed, or if she’s speaking nonsense as well…”)

The two parted ways a little while after. Realising he had some more time in the day, Hayasaka decided to go talk to someone else.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Saiki at the beach.

Saiki: “…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Saiki. Ah, um, would you like to… talk with me for a while?”

Saiki: “… *I guess* .”

Hayasaka spent some time with Saiki. Very much unsure what to give him, Hayasaka gifted him a Shonen Jump manga.

Saiki: “…”

Hayasaka: “I hope I’m not too tone deaf when it comes to teenagers these days, but, I’m sure you like manga, right?”

Saiki: “ *I’m a little surprised they have this manga here…* ”

Hayasaka: (“Well, at least he doesn’t appear to be unimpressed…”)

Saiki: “…”

Hayasaka: ("Ah, I know I asked Saiki to hang out, but we've hardly even talked… To be completely honest, I don't know how to start a conversation with him. Seeing as he's always so quiet, I'm unsure what he even likes. And since I don't know his talent either, I can't ask about that…")

Saiki: "…"

Hayasaka: ("I suppose… I'll start simple.") "S-So, Saiki, what's your family life like?"

Saiki: " *I live with my mom and dad* ."

Hayasaka: "Oh? What're they like?"

Saiki: " *They're much too involved with each other. It's annoying watching them gush over one another at the dinner table.* "

Hayasaka: ("Hm, so his parents have a stable relationship? That's good.")

Saiki: " *My mom is the more bearable out of the two. While she's sweet and has taught me a lot of good advice, she can be quite naive. My dad on the other hand is just annoying. He asks me for too many favours. But I guess he's not the worst. He works as a manga editor, although he makes the strangest decisions when it comes to overlooking the story* ."

Hayasaka: ("I suppose his dad just wants him to be able to look after them when they get old?") "Are you an only child if you only live with your parents then?"

Saiki: " *No, I have an older brother, but he lives in London. I'd rather not talk about him* ."

Hayasaka: ("L-London, huh? I wonder what he's doing all the way over there… But, I suppose I should respect Saiki's wishes.") "Do you… have any pets?"

Saiki: " *There's a cat who sometimes sits outside our house and refuses to go away. My dad will do anything for them, but since my mom is allergic he's tried smuggling them into our house before. Otherwise we just feed it outside sometimes* ."

Hayasaka: ("Does this make Saiki a cat person? He shares a similar personality to one of a cat, haha…")

Saiki: "…"

Hayasaka: ("Regardless, he looks like he doesn't want to talk anymore. I would look the same if someone kept throwing questions at me… Perhaps next time he'll be more talkative? Haha, I doubt that.")

The two parted ways a little while after. Hayasaka decided to go back to check on Kurumada, since so much time had already passed. Fortunately, he was still at the park, deep into some intense cool down stretches.

Kurumada: "Hah, hey, Hayasaka."

Hayasaka: "How have you been getting along, then?"

Kurumada: "I've hardly broken a sweat, haha."

Hayasaka: "Why don't you take a break for now? Perhaps we could go check on Mai and the boat team?"

Kurumada: "Eh, I mean, if ya insist…"

Hayasaka: "W-Well I'm not forcing you to or anything, but I don't want you overworking yourself…"

Kurumada: "Ha, like I could ever overwork myself. But, no, I get where ya comin' from."

Shortly after arriving at the beach, the two paused upon overhearing a small commotion come into earshot.

Natsuki: “C’mon, already! This isn’t fair!”

Bojack: “Would you stop going on about it for god’s sake? I’m getting a headache over here.”

Kurumada: “The hell’s going on?”

Natsuki: “Me and Yuri have been working for ages on the boat, so it’s only fair that we get a break. But, these jerks won’t give up their turn!”

L: “I’ve never been referred to as a jerk before. It almost makes me feel a little sad.”

Hayasaka: “Does Walter know about this?”

Natsuki: “No. He’s just been standing on the other side of the beach looking over the blueprints the whole time. He’s practically ignoring his ‘team’ he’s supposed to be overseeing.”

L: “Oh, you see, I’m not actually on a break. I’ve simply clocked out for the day, as it’s not wise to waste my energy physically when I’m still attempting to investigate this island.”

Kurumada: “What’s the point in that when we’re gonna be leavin’ here soon?”

L: “Even if we do manage to escape, we can’t let this company get away with what they’re doing. Think about it: if we leave them be, who’s to say they won’t try and kidnap us again?”

Kurumada: “…Whatever. What’s your excuse?”

Bojack: “Eh, I’ve just had enough manual labour for a day.”

Natsuki: “Are you kidding me?! Yuri and I have been working non-stop, and we’re only highschoolers!”

Mai: “I’m back with refreshments, everyone! Care for an ice-cold lemonade?”

Mai skipped onto the beach with a tray of drinks in hand. Bojack was the first to take up the offer, taking a swig of the drink he snatched off the tray. He then turned back to Natsuki.

Bojack: “You’ll understand when you’re older then."

Natsuki: “Ugh–!”

Yuri: “Natsuki, p-please calm down! I wouldn’t bother getting worked up over this…”

Jesse: “Yo, what’s all the fuss about over here? I can hear you guys from a mile away.”

Kurumada: “Apparently, there’s a scrap over who’s break it is or somethin’.”

Natsuki: “It’s me and Yuri’s turn! Can you tell them to get back to work?”

Jesse: “Well, uh, why don’t you just take your break anyway?”

Natsuki: “Hmph. Fine by me.”

Natsuki huffed and stomped over to the deck chairs, Yuri giving the group a quick apologetic bow before speeding off after her.

Hayasaka: “...That wasn’t a very organised way of handling things.”

Jesse: “Look, yo: with Mr. White lookin’ over the blueprints and all that shit, I’m the only one who can manage the group at the moment. But, y’know, he’s just stressed from having put a large responsibility on his shoulders. He was overlookin’ everyone earlier, I swear.”

Mai: “It’s not all bad, I believe. Look at the three over there: they’ve been working ever-so diligently without requesting a single break!”

Hayasaka glanced over to where Mai gestured towards to see Retsuko, Brian and Saiki working away.

Hayasaka: (“No, it’s probably the office condition of being modest that’s keeping Retsuko and Brian from speaking up. Saiki on the other hand… I can only chalk that up to how quiet he is.”)

At that moment, Walter walked up to the group, tucking the blueprints he had been holding away into his back pocket.

Walter: “Everyone, listen up. There’s thirty minutes until the nighttime announcement, and in order to keep us all safe, we’ll begin to clear up and head back to the hotel.”

Walter then gave a nod to Jesse, who gave him a blank look for a moment until his eyes widened and returned the nod. The two then jogged off, only to return dragging a large aluminium case onto the sand.

Kurumada: “Hey, what’s that for?”

Walter: “To ensure no funny business occurs overnight, I’ll be keeping all tools locked away in this case. The key, of course, will be held onto by me.”

L: “And what gives you the authority to decide such a thing? Why should we trust you?”

Walter: “Do I really have to explain this to you? I was the one to propose the idea of the boat in the first place. Why would I attempt anything when we have a perfectly good option out of here?”

L stared at him for a moment, and then simply nodded, trudging off as Walter frustratedly shook his head. The rest of the tools were collected and handed into the case, which was promptly locked up.

Mai: “I’m going to go see how Latte’s been doing in her group before I go to bed. I’ll see you two in the morning!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, goodnight, Mai. I guess that leaves the two of us to walk back to the hotel together, huh?”

Kurumada: “I just hope they don’t mention any of what happened earlier to her…”

The two made their way back to the hotel, Kurumada pausing as he rested his hand on his room’s door handle.

Kurumada: “Y’know, you’re pretty lucky you ain’t working on that boat team. Shit’s hectic as hell.”

Hayasaka: “I’d probably be too afraid to request a break, in all honesty. Haha…”

Kurumada: “Hey, look on the brightside: you don’t have to worry about doin’ any of the heavy labour stuff, right?”

Hayasaka: “I… No. I don’t feel credible this way. They’re all getting along without complaint, so who’s to say I’m allowed to get away with doing nothing?”

Hayasaka lingered as Kurumada remained unresponsive for a few beats.

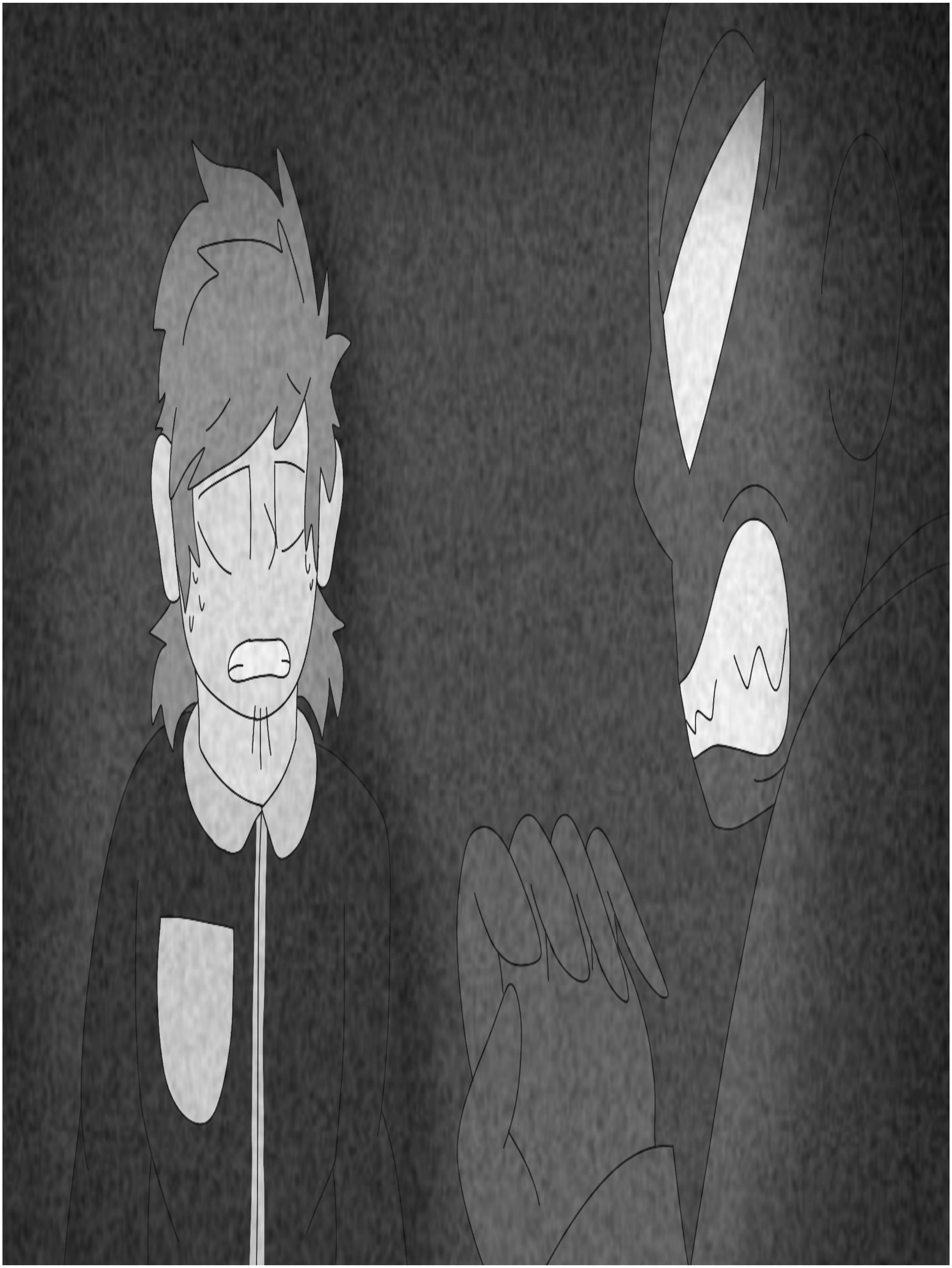
Kurumada: “...Get some rest, Hayasaka. I’m feeling like startin’ my training a lot earlier tomorrow.”

Hayasaka looked at him for a moment, eyes trailing off to the floor and nodding. Bidding each other goodnight, they finally went into their rooms.

Hayasaka: (“What was Kurumada trying to say back there? I just… I feel like it’s wrong of me to not contribute at least something to the boat team. Perhaps I could help them out tomorrow some time? I just hope I can make up for my poor labour skills…”)

Hayasaka, after the tiresome day, soon went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???#1: “Entry three–”

???#2: “What the hell is taking so long? I asked this thing to be done before next week, and I said that a week ago!”

???#1: “Boss, I understand that this is taking longer than you expected, but please–”

???#2: “No buts, I don’t give a damn on what goes on. I need my mascot done and that’s final. You need to get your team working, instead of being the lazy asses you’re all acting like right now. There will be serious consequences to you all if this isn’t done as soon as possible.”

???#1: “...Yes boss…”

???#2: “Good. Now you may get back to whatever you scums were up to. I’ll return in a few hours, and I expect lots of progress to be made. If there’s not much done by the time I come back, I’m going to kill you with my bare hands, GOT IT?!”

SLAM

…

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Ah, but don’t rush outta your rooms just yet! Kehe. I have an important announcement to make.”

Promptly awoken, Hayasaka faltered as the sadistic voice droned on, sitting up in his bed and reaching for his glasses as he glanced towards the monitor.

Monotora: “May I be the first to say how PISSED OFF I am for having to wait through four whole days without a SINGLE murder commited?! Because of you all, I’ve become incredibly impatient. And do you know what happens when I become impatient? I get bloodthirsty. There’s not a whole lotta small prey scurrying around the island no more – and I'm THIS close to breaking into that damn hotel and feasting on the first person I see. Of couse, to counteract this, the oh-so kind members of Nesos have created a… *motivation* , of sorts, to convince you all the benefits of murder! On each of your tables, there should be a letter addressed to you from a 'special someone' from your lives back at home. What's inside? Well, that's for you to find out. I only suggest you don't become too sentimental after reading 'em… Ahaha!"

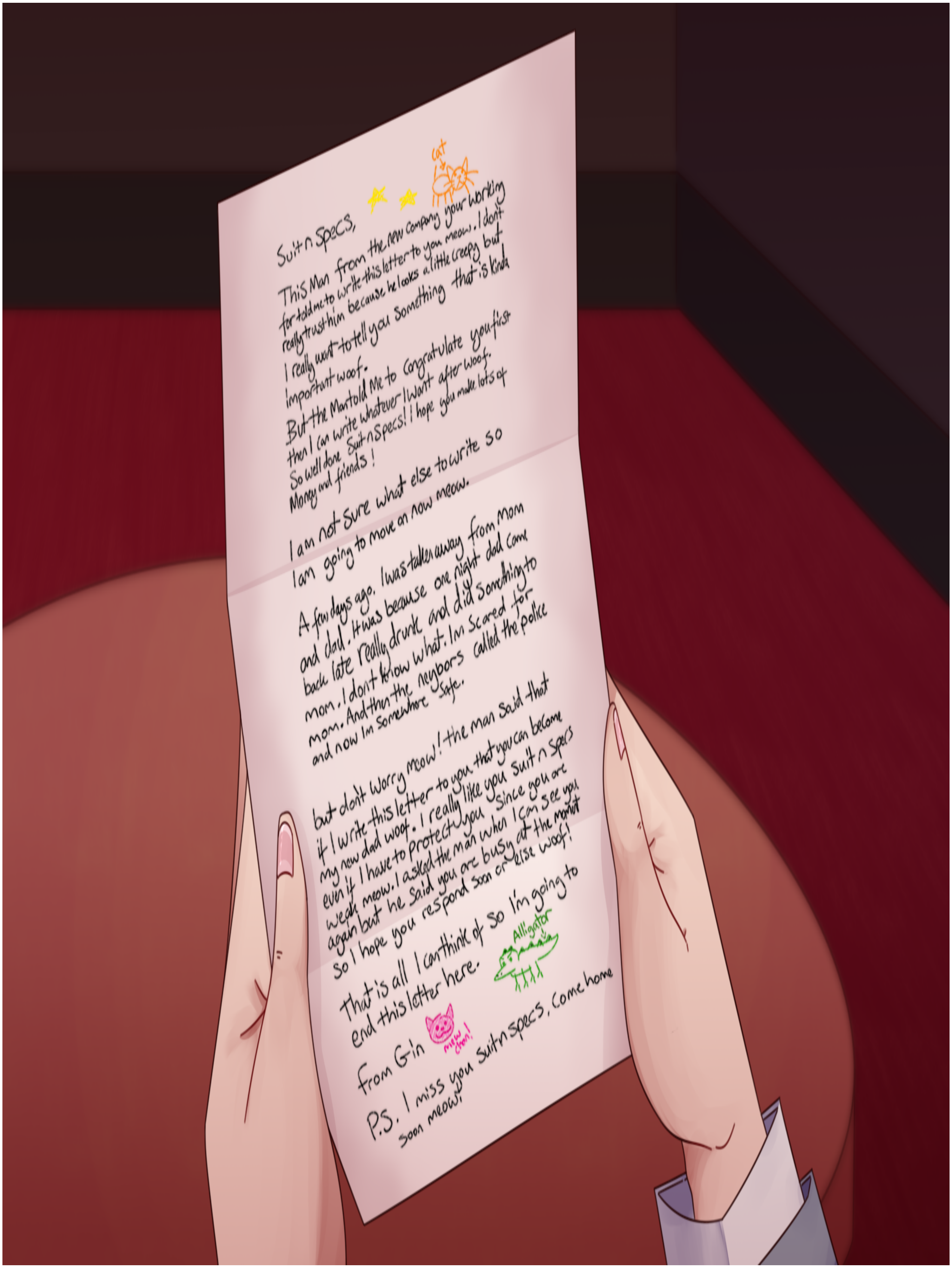
The broadcast promptly ended after a snide laugh from Monotora. Hayasaka, now sitting on the edge of his bed after preparing himself as the announcement played on previously, turned to look at the table. Monotora was right.

Hayasaka: ("When was that letter placed in my room…? Did it get past everyone without waking someone up? And, well, more importantly, should I read it…?")

The hands resting in Hayasaka's lap slid down his thighs as he pushed himself off the bed and walked towards the table. Hesitantly picking up the letter, the first thing he noticed about the envelope was that his name was written in an awfully childish handwriting, complete with a small doodle of a paw print beside it. Hayasaka paused.

Hayasaka: "..."

Forcing his mind to keep all subconscious thoughts out of the forefront of his head, Hayasaka carefully opened the envelope up with a slight tremor in his hands, and read the contents.



Suit n Specs,

This Man from the new company your working
for told me to write this letter to you meow. I don't
really trust him because he looks a little creepy but
I really want to tell you Something that is kinda
important woof.

But the Man told Me to Congratulate you first
then I can write whatever I want after woof.
So well done Suit n Specs! I hope you make lots of
Money and friends!

I am not Sure what else to write so
I am going to move on now meow.

A few days ago. I was talken away from Mom
and dad. It was because one night dad came
back late really drunk and did Something to
mom. I dont know what. Im Scared for
mom. And then the neybors called the police
and now Im Somewhere Safe.

but don't worry meow! the man Said that
if I write this letter to you that you can become
my new dad woof. I really like you Suit n Specs
even if I have to protect you since you are
weak meow. I asked the man when I can see you
again but he Said you are busy at the momnt
so I hope you respond soon or else woof!

That is all I can think of so I'm going to
end this letter here.

From Gin

P.S. I miss you Suit n specs, Come home
soon meow!

Suit N Specs,

This man from the new company your working for told me to write this letter to you meow. I don't really trust him because he looks a little creepy but I really want to tell you something that is kinda important woof.

But the man told me to congratulate you first then I can write whatever I want after woof. So well done Suit N Specs! I hope you make lots of money and friends!

I am not sure what else to write so I am going to move on now meow.

A few days ago, I was taken away from mom and dad. It was because one night dad came back late really drunk and did something to mom. I don't know what. I'm scared for mom. And then the neybors called the police and now I'm somewhere safe.

But don't worry meow! The man said that if I write this letter to you that you can become my new dad woof. I really like you Suit N Specs even if I have to protect you since you are weak meow. I asked the man when I can see you again but he said you are busy at the moment so I hope you respond soon or else woof!!!

That is all I can think of so I'm going to end this letter here.

From Gin

P.S. I miss you Suit N Specs, come home soon!!

Gin. It was from Gin. That was the first thing Hayasaka finally let himself realise. And, despite the spelling and grammatical errors laced within the message, what Gin was trying to communicate to him was all too clear.

Hayasaka had only realised he was panicking when he noticed his hands were shaking.

Hayasaka: (“Gin? *Gin?!* Why do they know about Gin? I never told them about… Did they find out his connection to me somehow? Wait–a-and what is this whole thing with his parents? Don’t tell me… No, t-this can’t be real, can it? Oh my god, I have to see him. I have to see Gin. I-I have to leave this island and see Gin now! But, that means I need to–”)

Hayasaka faltered. His fingers gripped tightly onto the letter still in his hands, crumpling the paper slightly.

Hayasaka: (“No, no–what am I talking about? Have I already gone mad? I’m not–I can’t do that. I can’t *kill* someone just because of this! I’m incapable! I-It’s immoral! But–god, this motive is too cruel…!”)

Feeling his foot tapping against the carpet, Hayasaka shoved the letter into his pocket and, without thinking too much on what he was doing next, rushed out of his room. Before he could get too far, he bumped into someone much bigger than him, causing him to stumble back with a pang of shock.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada! I-I’m sorry! I wasn’t thinking–I-I wasn’t looking where I was going and–”

Kurumada: “Hey, hey! Calm down for Christ's sake! What the hell’s even wrong with ya?”

Hayasaka’s throat was too dry to even fumble for an answer.

Kurumada: “...It’s the letter, ain’t it?”

Hayasaka nodded. Kurumada crossed his arms with a scowl.

Kurumada: “Shit. Fuckin’–Fuck this motive! Argh… Let’s just head to the restaurant, alright? Maybe we can find some answers outta somebody. I ain’t afraid to get rough, y’hear?”

Hayasaka wanted to disagree with his idea to potentially get ‘rough’ with people, but simply followed him down to the restaurant instead. Inside, it was just as Hayasaka suspected: all his inner thoughts on verbal display. The majority of the group were in disarray, arguing over each other about the contents of the letter and the person who wrote it. Mai was the first to notice his and Kurumada’s arrival, and quickly hurried over to them.

Mai: “Thank goodness – I’m so happy to see you two!”

Kurumada: “Mai, did you read the letter ya got?”

Mai: “Yes! Oh, they’re so horrible! I was written to by Q-Taro; you know he’s a close friend of mine. And yet, he has no idea I’ve been stuck on an island for four days straight! What a sick thing for the company to do!”

Hayasaka: (“This is bad. At this rate, with all the commotion, somebody might–”)

Walter: “QUIET!”

The room turned to immediate silence. It was as if nobody was in the room to begin with. Deadly silence. Startled, Hayasaka turned to see Walter step into the restaurant with a dangerously cold face. Abruptly, however, Walter began to cough heavily, causing him to cover his hacking with an enclosed fist. Quiet remained until he was done, and he took a deep breath before carrying on.

Walter: “What the *hell* is all the commotion about? I can obviously tell you’ve all read the letter that was given to you, but this? This is absolutely ridiculous. I couldn’t even hear myself *think* as I tried to walk here. It’s in everyone’s best interest that we all ignore the letter and carry on with the boat’s production.”

Natsuki: “You’ve gotta be kidding me, right? *That’s* what you have to say? Y’know what? I’m not working on the boat anymore!”

Brian: “H-Huh? Why?”

Natsuki: “There’s been too much labour forced upon us and no coherently planned breaks at all. What, did you expect us to work like machines? And that’s hardly the end of it: I have no idea what’ll happen to who wrote my letter if we all left the island on that boat. Who’s to say they won’t be in danger? I don’t want that!”

Yuri: “I-I have to agree with Natsuki! Our recipients were our friends from the literature club. I don’t want them getting hurt if we ignore those letters!”

Retsuko: “Same here! Mine was from a really close friend – what he wrote to me sounds really concerning and I just can’t get it off my mind!”

Bojack: “I was already too tired for this shit, and now this? I’m not good with stress. Don’t stress me out.”

Jesse: “Shit, Mr. White. I mean, I got mine from Jane. She’s like–she’s not in the best position right now, y’know? You’ve gotta be at least somewhat worried for whoever wrote to you, right?”

L: “That isn’t to say that the letters may merely be faked.”

Hayasaka: (“Faked? There’s no way that’s possible. Gin’s writing is too unique to be easily recreated. However, what he told me in the letter did appear to motivate me into thinking rather recklessly…”)

Ena: “Faking penmanship is so rude! That is the lowest of the low crimes! Lock them up, I say!”

Mai: “I don’t believe that. My letter felt too real to be faked!”

Natsuki: “I’d rather believe in a fake letter than potentially ignore a real one.”

Walter: “Are you even listening to yourselves? If you don’t build this boat, then you’ll never see *any* of them again regardless. What will you gain from backing out of this now?”

Hiroshi: “Perhaps… we should view this in an alternative light. Instead of seeing this as a reason to give up, these letters we have received should be regarded as a stronger reason to keep going. If these letters are real, then have we not been reminded of the people we’re doing this for? And, if they were fake the whole time, we are still displaying to Nesos we do not easily give in.”

Kaidou: “T-That’s… Hiroshi’s right! Only for a moment, I was hesitant about our upcoming battle against Monotora, but after seeing what my sworn friend wrote to me, I’ve been given power to work even harder for him!”

Saiki: “ *That’s easy for you to say when mine was written by the idiot …*”

Latte: “I agree! I received my letter from one of my closest students, and it reminded me of all of my other students waiting for me back home. I can’t give up now!”

Jesse: “...Heh, maybe you have a point. I could potentially impress Jane with my craftsmanship skills and all that shit.”

Natsuki: “...I’m–I’m not convinced one-hundred percent on this. But, I know it’s stupid to go against the majority, so if you think it’s fine, then…”

Walter: “This boat is all we have. There’s no reason why you should doubt me. This is our only option.”

After the meeting, most had been calmed down to a degree, and breakfast began with less tension hanging in the air. Hayasaka remained on the fence over the whole debacle, but it wasn’t as if he intended to ever voice his concerns. Instead, when he and Kurumada had finished eating, the two left for the park. He watched Kurumada work out again for a little while to make sure he wouldn’t try anything, before he deemed it safe to go socialise with some people.

Hayasaka: (“Whoever I decide to talk to, I hope they won’t snap at me due to the morning meeting, haha…”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Brian at the beach.

Brian: “What am I supposed to do to pass the time on an island exactly?”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Brian. Would you like to have a small talk for a while?”

Brian: “Oh, Hayasaka! S-Sure!”

Hayasaka spent some time with Brian. Unsure what to give him, he gifted him a book titled ‘Hexenhammer’.

Brian: “Huh? This is…”

Hayasaka: “Are you familiar with it? I only assumed since this book is apparently about witches, that you may like it…?”

Brian: “I guess it’s a little funny, considering I’ve read this before. Y-You never know when you need something like this again, right?”

Hayasaka: (“Why would he need it again? Ah, nevermind. As long as he likes it, I’m glad.”)

Brian: “…”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, look at us. We’re both so quiet. Haha, that’s to be expected when you put two quiet guys against each other to talk, right? I’m not good with conversation starters, and I can tell Brian is having trouble too.”)

Brian: “I-I’m sorry—that the conversation isn’t going anywhere! No one’s really tried to speak with me before, on the island I mean.”

Hayasaka: “Ah? Um, it’s alright. No one outside of Kurumada and Mai ever approaches me either, haha. I’ve actually just been trying to reach out to other people.” (“But, is that really true? *No one* has tried to talk to him? That’s honestly rather sad…”)

Brian: “Then… Oh, maybe you could ask me something? That could help, right?”

Hayasaka: “Hm… I suppose I’d like to know why you were hired as a ‘witch hunter’ for your old company in the first place.”

Brian: “I’m still very much unsure myself, seeing as Sintracorp is a Class-A company and all.”

Hayasaka: “Hang on. What’s ‘Class-A?”

Brian: “Huh? You haven’t heard of it before? Everyone where I live knows about it.”

Hayasaka: “Could you care to explain what it is?”

Brian: “Oh, um, sure! So, where I’m from, society is split into ‘classes’: the higher you are — such as Class-A — the better off your life is. On the other hand, the lower you go, the less respected you are…”

Hayasaka: (“So… social classes, but a lot more strict? Doesn’t sound like the most ideal life.”) “So what rank are you, Brian? If that isn’t rude of me to ask.”

Brian: “Um… I-I’m from class-G.”

Hayasaka: (“I suppose that’s around the working class then. It explains his natural lack of formality, haha.”)

Brian: “But when I received a letter from Sintracorp inviting me to work in the city, I was granted a permanent upgrade to class-A. To be honest, I don’t feel all that class-A aligned still, so I just call myself class-G, despite what I really am technically.”

Hayasaka: “That’s rather humble of you…”

Brian: “Is it? Well, it’s not like it matters. The letter was just a trick to hire me as a witch hunter. Even if they said I was chosen for a calculated reason, someone like me really has nothing to do with the occult! I just don’t understand it…”

Hayasaka: (“Being tricked like that – it’s definitely unfortunate. It’s rather similar to how we were all tricked by a letter from Nesos, isn’t it?”)

Brian: “...I’m grateful you didn’t make fun of me for my class, Hayasaka. W-We can hang out again, if you’d like!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I would never belittle someone for their class. I’m not even the most high-class person either, haha. Although, I wouldn’t mind chatting another time…”

The two parted ways after a little while. Seeing as he had some time left in the day, Hayasaka decided to go find somebody else to talk to.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Latte in the sports centre.

Latte: “This island’s making me so thirsty… how about I fancy myself to an extra sweet cup of latte?”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Latte. Would you perhaps like to have a small chat?”

Latte: “Oh, that sounds lovely, Hayasaka! Care to join me for a latte, in that case?”

Hayasaka spent some time with Latte. Unsure what she would like, but going off what he could assume, he gifted her a latte-art inspired cup.

Latte: “My, my! Isn’t this just so beautifully detailed? I think I’ll fancy using this from now on. Thank you so much, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Haha, i-it’s nothing, really. But I’m glad you like it.”

Latte: “Such a lovely drink… It’s just what I needed.”

Hayasaka: (“Latte seems to be caught up in her drink. I’m unsure what to say to start our conversation.”)

Latte: “Oh, Hayasaka, I can tell you appear to be a little nervous. Not to worry – I don’t bite.”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, I didn’t think so in the first place…”

Latte: “If it helps you to feel more comfortable, I can do most of the talking, provided you prompt me with a question.”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t believe she noticed how tense I was, haha… Perhaps that’s simply a teacher thing?”) “Hum… I suppose I’ll ask about your talent. You mentioned briefly before about what you teach, but I’m afraid I didn’t understand much of it…”

Latte: “I teach glyph magic in the general course to young cookies who wish to become skillful in the art of coffee magic. There’s so many aspiring students I meet every semester!”

Hayasaka: “...M-Magic, huh? So, you really weren’t joking last time? Does… Does magic *really* exist?”

Latte: “Hm? What’re you talking about? Magic has existed for many millennials on Earthbread.”

Hayasaka: “But I’m not from, uh, Earthbread.”

Latte: “Oh, that’s right! How silly of me, haha! Hang on. So *other* places don’t have magic? How do you even live without it?”

Hayasaka: “I assure you I manage just fine, haha… Just continue on.”

Latte: “Right, where was I… ah. Even though I was admitted by Nesos as the Ultimate Professor, sometimes I don’t necessarily feel like the most efficient teacher there is.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? And why’s that?”

Latte: “I’m usually late for most of my classes, letting time wind past me as I’m caught up in a daydream and a delicious latte in the teacher’s lounge.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder how she hasn’t been laid off with such tardiness… At least it explains why she’s always late to the restaurant in the mornings…”)

Latte: “Oh my! Speaking of tardiness, I just realised I had something to attend to just now! I’m dearly sorry for making you believe I was free to chat.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, it’s fine really. I’d like to talk again when you are, if that’s not too much trouble.”

Latte: “That sounds like a deal!”

The two then parted ways a little while later.

Hayasaka: (“Right then… I want to head to the beach now to see if I can help with the boat team…”)

To Hayasaka’s dismay however, he was taken aback to find everyone at the beach was packing away their tools. Confused, he decided to approach the person closest to him.

Brian: “Oh, Hayasaka? What’re you doing here?”

Hayasaka: “I originally came here to see if I could help out, but… Can I ask what’s going on? Why’re you all clearing away so early?”

Brian: “Walter told everyone that we could finish early because the boat’s almost finished. See?”

Hayasaka peered over towards the boat, and hummed.

Hayasaka: (“It appears to be about done.”) But, it’s a little small, isn’t it? Haha…”

Brian rubbed the back of his head.

Brian: “I-I guess we didn’t have a whole lot of resources to make a bigger one. I don’t mind having to squeeze in order to get home… Um, Walter also said that the boat’s going to be tested on the water tomorrow. If all goes well, we’ll be able to go home. It honestly sounds crazy, but I’m happy things are turning out this way.”

Hayasaka: “I see. I’m sorry that I didn’t contribute much to the boat’s production…”

Brian: “No, that’s okay! Apparently you’ve been watching over your friend, Kurumada? I guess you’ve been worried about him a lot, which is important in my eyes.”

Hayasaka: “Really? Thank you, Brian. Speaking of Kurumada, I really should go check up on him now.”

Brian waved goodbye to Hayasaka as he walked off towards the park. However, halfway there or so, he bumped into someone he didn't quite expect to see.

Hayasaka: "Ah, I-I'm sorry for… Jesse?"

Jesse: "Damnit, where the hell did it go…?"

Hayasaka: "A-Are you looking for something?"

Jesse: "Yeah, just–just my lighter, alright? You seen it anywhere?"

Hayasaka: "Why would you have a lighter with you?"

Jesse: "Look, just–I always got a lighter on me, y'know? And, for some reason, I woke up with it here. But that doesn't matter 'cuz it's missin' for some reason."

Hayasaka: "Well, I'm afraid I haven't seen it around here… Where did you last see it?"

Jesse: "I dunno–shit! Am I supposed to keep track of shit like that? Anyway, if it ain't here, then I'm gonna bounce. Fuck, man…"

And just like that, Jesse had rushed off, cursing under his breath. Hayasaka stood there for a moment, but continued towards the park knowing it was none of his business. Arriving at the park, Hayasaka expected to see Kurumada performing his usual cool down routine, or perhaps cooling himself off by the fountain. However, he was met with none of that: Kurumada wasn't even there.

Hayasaka: "K-Kurumada…?" ("What? Where did he go? Surely he's just somewhere around here, r-right?")

Hayasaka then searched around the park, knowing Kurumada would be near impossible to miss. And yet, he returned empty handed. Not a single sign of Kurumada anywhere. He felt a cold sweat trail down the back of his neck as he attempted to keep himself together. Turning sharply on his heel, Hayasaka made a dash back towards the beach, seeing how it was the closest location to the park.

Hayasaka: ("Oh god… No no no… Kurumada, where are you? He didn't actually go and challenge Monotora while I was gone, did he? I'm so stupid for leaving him alone all this time! W-What was I even thinking?")

Back at the beach, Hayasaka frantically darted his eyes around the open space. Eventually, his sight landed on someone large and muscular, sitting underneath a palm tree and mumbling frustratedly to himself. Hayasaka let out a sigh of pure relief, feeling the adrenaline once inside him die down.

Hayasaka: "T-There you are…"

His quiet mutter caused Kurumada to turn and look up at him.

Kurumada: "Hayasaka? Shit, I kinda forgot you were s'posed to be watchin' over me. Sorry 'bout that…"

Hayasaka: "No, it's fine. As long as you're safe… W-What're you doing here?"

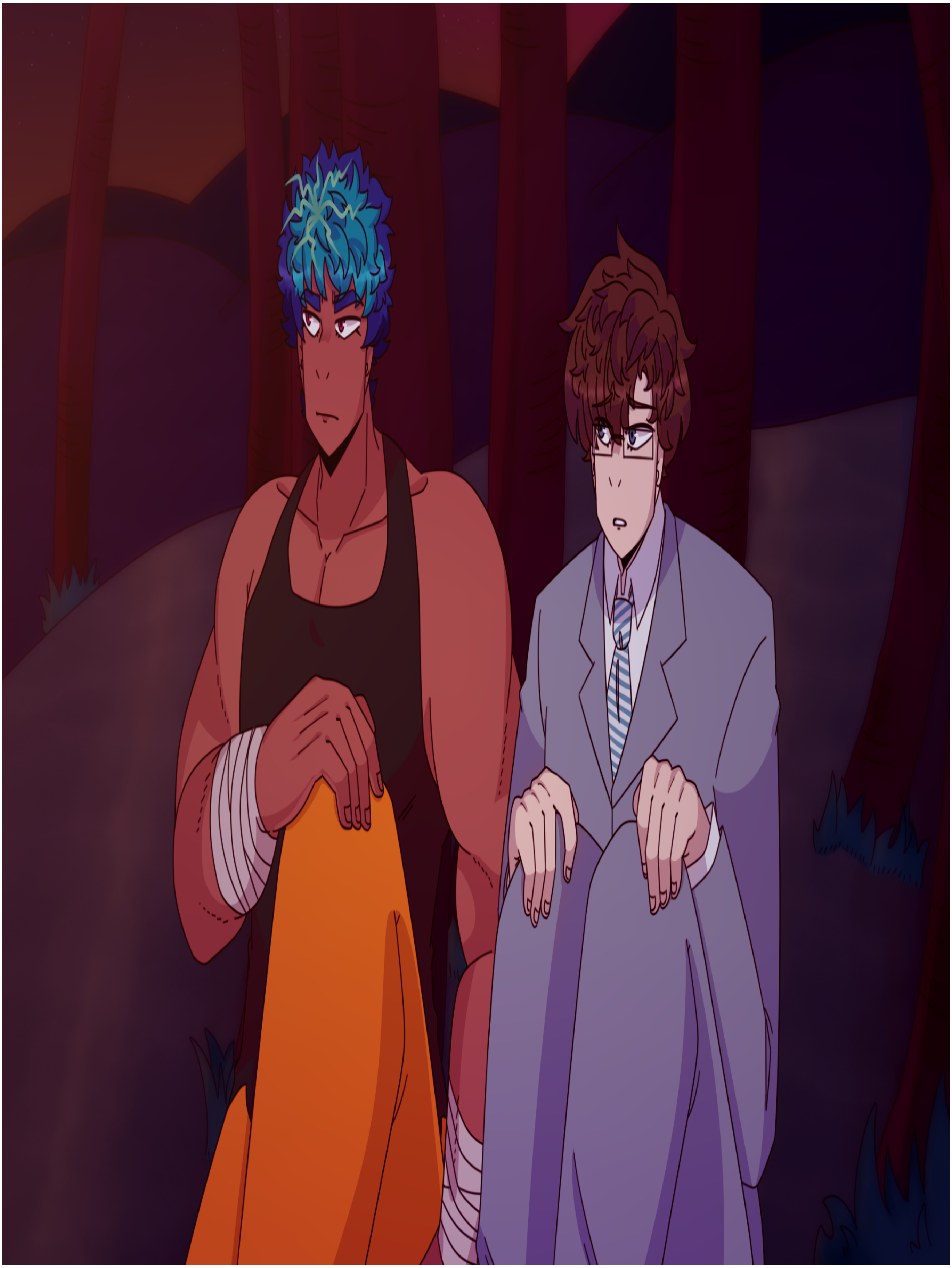
Kurumada: "Just… doin' some thinking."

Hayasaka nodded, and remained still for a moment. He pursed his lips as the air became awkward.

Kurumada: "...You can sit down, y'know? I ain't forcing ya to stand around, haha."

Hayasaka: "Oh. Um, of course…"

Hayasaka quickly sat down beside him, feeling his cheeks heat up in mild embarrassment.



Kurumada: “...So, I heard that we’re leavin’ tomorrow.”

Hayasaka: “Y-Yeah. The boat’s almost close to completion, or so I’m told.”

Kurumada: “Mm. Kinda feels a bit too easy for things to be happenin’ this way, doesn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “Honestly, I have to agree. It’s strange Monotora hasn’t tried to stop us at all yet.”

Kurumada: “Then that only means there’s gonna be a larger possibility they’re gonna attack us when we try an’ leave tomorrow.”

Hayasaka: “Are you ready for that? To fight them off, I mean.”

Kurumada: “‘Course. If I can at least get you and Mai off this damn island, then that’s good enough for me.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, you shouldn’t say that sort of thing and not include yourself…!”

Kurumada: “Heheh. You’ve always been the worrisome type, haven’t ya?”

Hayasaka: “...Um, do you mind if I get something off my chest?”

Kurumada: “Oh? What’s up?”

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry, it’s just that the letter that I received this morning has been on my mind all day… It was written from Gin, you see.”

Kurumada: “Wait, really? Damn.”

Hayasaka: “According to him, his parents got into a fight, and now he’s been taken into custody.”

Kurumada: “ *Shit* . That’s…”

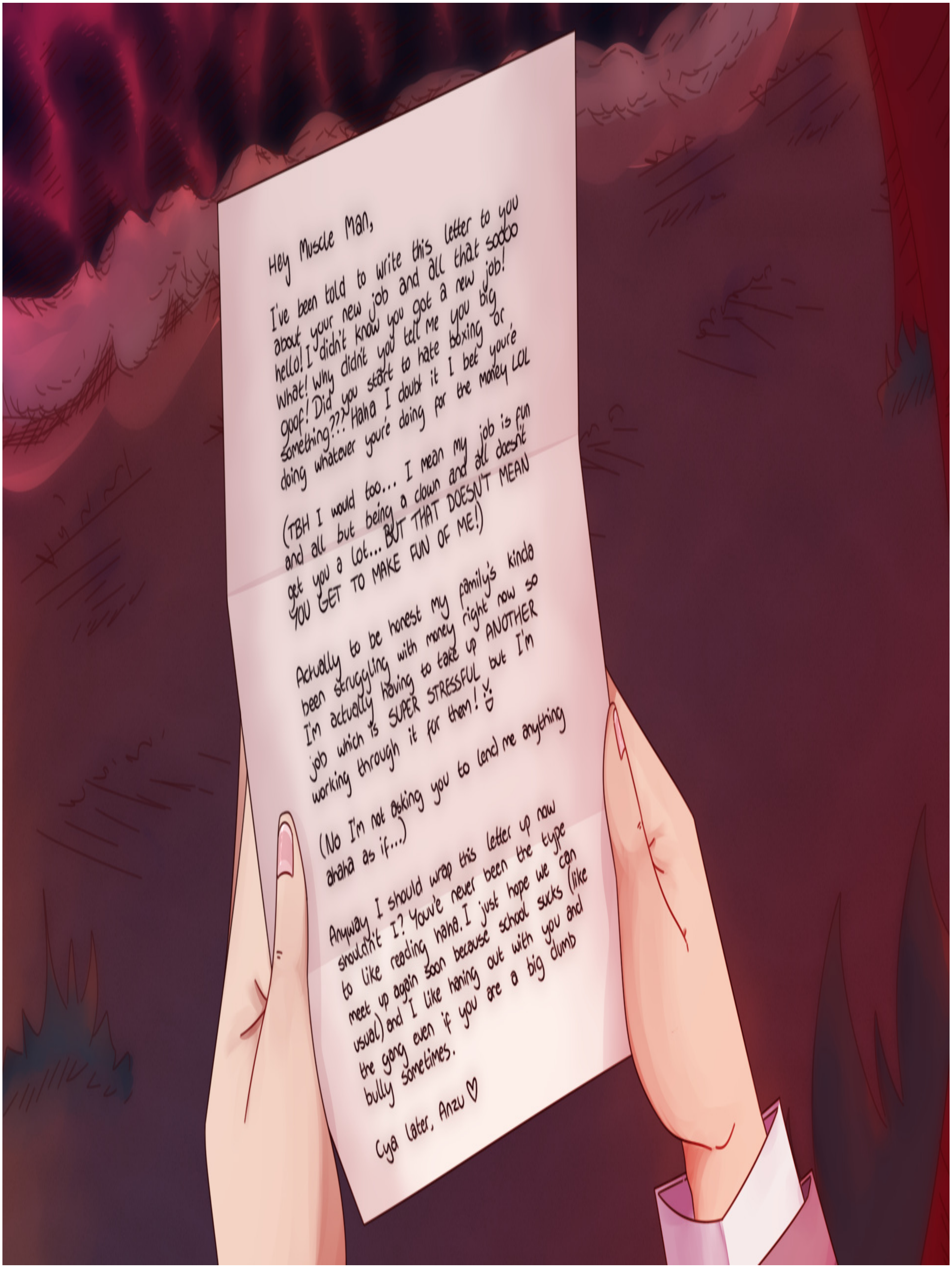
Hayasaka: “I-I know. But, apparently I’m… going to be his new guardian? I-If I return, that is.”

Kurumada: “Heh, that’s great, ain’t it? I’ve always known you’ve loved him more than anyone else. I’m sure you’re gonna make a great dad. Just, uh, prepare yourself for the ‘dilf’ jokes from Anzu. She’s always been into that crazy shit…”

Hayasaka raised a brow, but shook it off with a quiet chuckle.

Kurumada: “...Speakin’ of Anzu…”

Kurumada then took out a slightly crumpled piece of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Hayasaka. From it’s layout, he assumed it was the letter received this morning.



Hey Muscle Man,

I've been told to write this letter to you about your new job and all that soooo hello! I didn't know you got a new job! What! Why didn't you tell me you big goof! Did you start to hate boxing or something??.. Haha I doubt it I bet you're doing whatever you're doing for the money LOL

(TBH I would too... I mean my job is fun and all but being a clown and all doesn't get you a lot... BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET TO MAKE FUN OF ME!)

Actually to be honest my family's kinda been struggling with money right now so I'm actually having to take up ANOTHER job which is SUPER STRESSFUL but I'm working through it for them!

(No I'm not asking you to lend me anything ahaha as if...)

Anyway I should wrap this letter up now shouldn't I? You've never been the type to like reading haha. I just hope we can meet up again soon because school sucks (like usual) and I like haning out with you and the gang even if you are a big dumb bully sometimes.

Cya later, Anzu ♡

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Cya later, Anzu <3

Hayasaka: ("...Ah, so Kurumada received his letter from Anzu? From the looks of it, she also appears to be in a situation like Gin currently is.")

Kurumada: "...You don't have to comment on it, but I did feel a bit emotional after readin' it. Thank god she ain't around to tease me for it. I s'pose it's helped as a 'motivator', like the group called it this mornin'."

Hayasaka: "Well, you have more reason than ever to help the group now, haha… However, I myself haven't done anything worth noting. I missed my opportunity to help out with the boat since they cleared away early…"

Hayasaka kept his eyes locked onto the sand. He watched as Kurumada remained quiet for a moment, before shaking his head.

Kurumada: “...Nah. You wanna know something? I was plannin’ to attempt a one-on-one with Monotora again after hearin’ what Kaidou and his team had to say to me. But when I ran into ya, I decided against it.”

Hayasaka: “ *What* ? But, I don’t understand…”

Kurumada: “Look. What I’m tryn’a say is, you saved me from doin’ something dangerous, and your efforts in watchin’ over me weren’t all for nothing like you might think.”

Hayasaka reflected on what Kurumada had just told him, and solemnly nodded.

Hayasaka: “...I’m glad to have saved you. B-But, I’m not finished yet. Let’s go back to the hotel, okay? It’s getting late.”

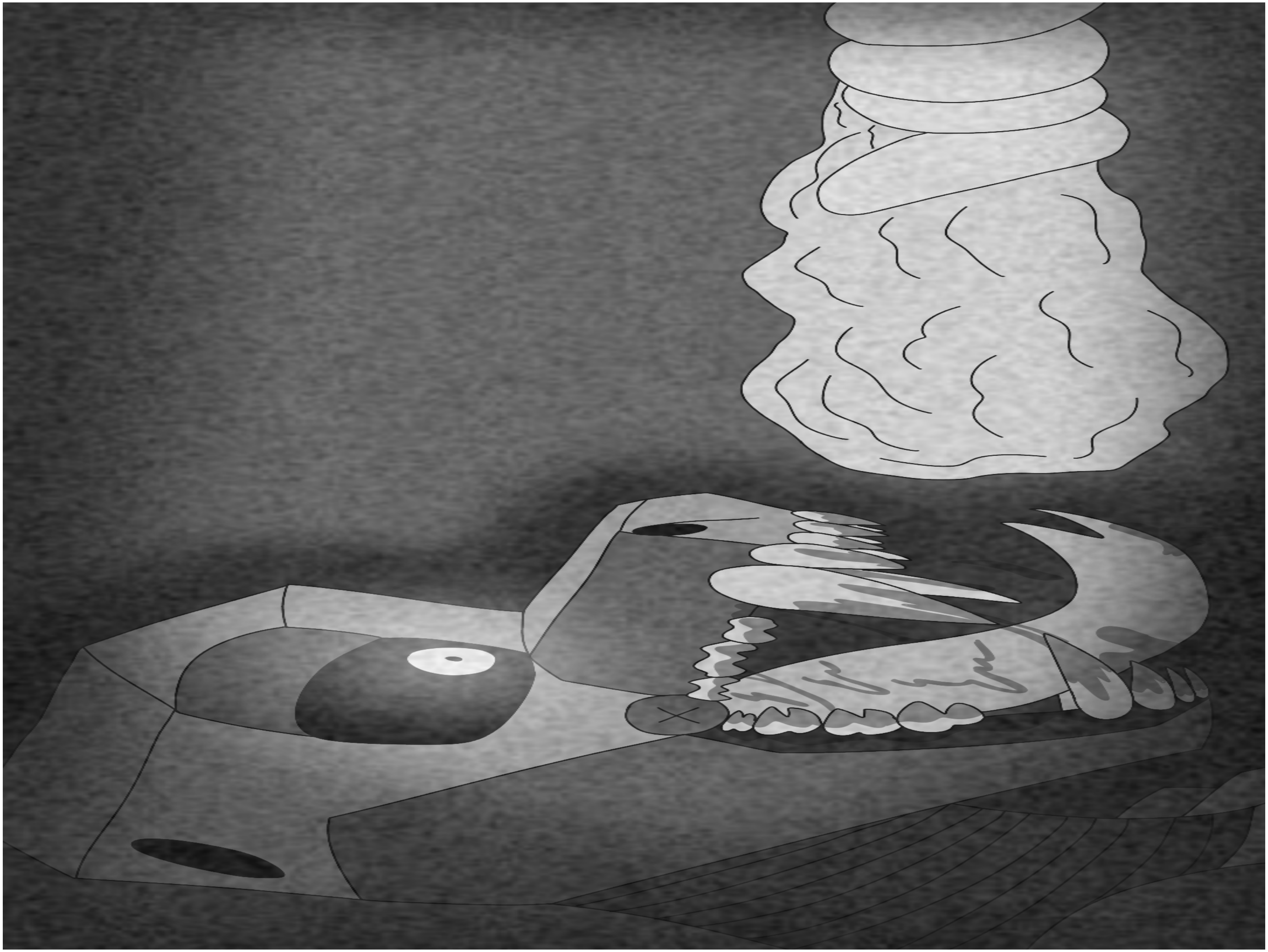
Kurumada: “...Heh, alright.”

Getting up, the two walked together to the hotel. Exchanging goodnights, they went into their respective rooms.

Hayasaka: (“...I feel a lot calmer than I did this morning. That must be good, right? While I am still terribly worried about Gin, he’s a brave kid, isn’t he? I’m certain he can hold out just for a little while longer… Anyway, I just hope the boat ride home isn’t too unpleasant, haha…”)

Feeling his eyelids become heavy, Hayasaka decided to call it a night.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: "We're on the fourth entry of this project. We have begun testing its ability to consume products. This is also to test its digestive system we've added to make it more realistic... Well, that's what our boss said. As it's supposed to be a tiger mascot, we've given it different kinds of meat ranging from mice to cows. It seems to enjoy meat, given it's the only thing that's being hand fed by some of the team. However, it results in it regurgitating the food back up after a certain amount of time, which is horrid when it comes to cleaning since the smell is so *vile* . Even recently, a worker has told me it tried to bite them when they were walking by. So, I'm beginning to suspect that it will be constantly hungry even if we finish constructing the rest of the limbs and give it it's own voice. There's nothing we can do to fix its hunger unfortunately. Since our boss wants it to act like a wild animal, then we just have to accept it for what it is."

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead."

The initial feeling Hayasaka was met with when waking up was a mild excitement. It concerned him, but strived to get ready regardless.

Hayasaka: ("I'm not even sure why I'm excited… The boat's not one-hundred percent ready. It hasn't even been tested out yet. But, I can't help admit that if we really are going home today, then I'm just glad this nightmare situation can finally be put to an end.")

Leaving his hotel room, he half-anticipated to encounter a run-in with someone else, but instead noticed how quiet it was, leaving him slightly unnerved. Brushing it off, he continued to the restaurant downstairs. Scanning around, he could only spot just about half of the group present. And a lack of either of his friends.

Retsuko: "Good morning, Hayasaka. Are you alright? You look a little shaken."

Hayasaka: "Ah… w-where is everyone else?"

Retsuko: "Um, I don't know, actually. Sorry."

Hayasaka: (“So she hasn’t seen Mai or Kurumada at all yet? O-Okay, well, maybe they’ll show up soon…”)

Contemplating whether or not he should take a seat to calm his nerves, he noticed Bojack stroll in at his usual time.

Bojack: “Hey, where’s my favourite duo gone?”

Yuri: “I-I haven’t seen Walter nor Jesse show up yet…”

Natsuki: “For the ones who put this whole boat thing together, it’s kinda rude of them not to show up on the morning we’re set to leave.”

Hiroshi: “Kaidou has also neglected to show up. Perhaps you may know where he is, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *Don’t rely on me for his whereabouts* .”

Hayasaka: (“And yet, there’s still no sign of Kurumada or Mai either… No, no… Did something happen to either of them? I don’t want to think that, b-but…”)

Mai: “Good morning, Hayasaka!”

Hayasaka: “Ah!”

Hayasaka jumped as Mai popped her head out from behind the kitchen door frame with her familiar cheery smile.

Hayasaka: “Oh, s-so you were in the kitchen this whole time. I should’ve figured, haha…”

Just then, Hayasaka heard sneakers graze into the restaurant tiles.

Jesse: “ *Yawn* … Mr. White, why didn’t you wake me up, yo?”

Ena: “The Walter you speak of is not here. Would you like to leave a message?”

Jesse: “What…?”

Natsuki: “I thought you’d be with Walter finalising the plans or something. I was getting super impatient.”

Jesse: “No…? I haven’t seen him at all this mornin’...”

Hayasaka: (“That means there’s now four people missing…”)

Latte: “I’m worried about Kaidou. I hope he didn’t wander off and get himself hurt! I propose we go search for him.”

Hiroshi: “And regards to the other missing individuals?”

Latte: “They’re adults – they can fend for themselves.”

Saiki: “ *She doesn’t seem concerned for them at all* …”

Bojack: “Come on. I’m sure they’ll turn up eventually.”

Jesse: “…Hell no. We’re–we’re splittin’ up and searchin’ for ‘em. C’mon!”

Everyone followed Jesse out of the restaurant, apart from a few who had stayed behind. Hayasaka hadn’t noticed: he was staring straight ahead into nothing, only managing to make out the voices around him as a ringing in his ears grew stronger as the seconds passed.

Bojack: “Are they serious? I’m sure they’re just overreacting…”

Mai: “Hayasaka, are you alright?”

Hayasaka snapped back into reality, realising the restaurant was near empty. He had zoned out, beginning to feel uneasy at the thoughts swarming his brain.

Hayasaka: “I…”

Mai: “You’re worried about Kurumada, aren’t you? That’s alright – I’m going to help you find him. Just know that whatever you may be thinking, you and I both know he’s not the type to go down so easily.”

Hayasaka nodded, taking a deep breath.

???: “GAHHH!!”

Latte: “Oh my! Who was that?”

The remainder of the people in the restaurant rushed out into the lobby where the scream had originally come from. Hayasaka paused as he witnessed an odd scene.

Kaidou: “D-D-Dark Reunion! Help! T-They’ve caught me at my worst moment!”

L: “...Do I look that freaky to you?”

Kaidou: “E-Eh? *L* ?! I-I’m sorry! I wasn’t looking very clearly – I’ve only just woken up! Please forgive me!”

L: “Quite the amusing explanation.”

Latte: “Kaidou! Oh thank goodness you’re alright!”

Latte had sped over to Kaidou’s side and put her hand on his shoulder, causing him to tense up and turn a mild shade of pink.

Latte: “Where were you?”

Kaidou: “I–U-Um… I overslept the announcement. It’s just… I guess our late-night training from last night really tired me out. And, I couldn’t sleep thinking about going up against Monotora… I-It’s just going to be a tough battle, is all!”

???: “The hell’s goin’ on out here?”

Hayasaka: “Ah–!”

Hayasaka swiftly whipped his head around upon hearing the all too familiar voice speak up behind him.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada! Oh, thank goodness! O-Oh my god…”

Kurumada: “What the – what’s wrong? I saw a bunch of people run outta the hotel a minute ago.”

Hayasaka: “I-I thought… I thought you–...”

Kurumada: “*... Died* ? You thought I died?”

Hayasaka could only nod as he felt his throat refuse to produce the words.

Kurumada: “Baha, well I’m not dead. I just look a little longer to get ready. Sorry for scaring ya half to death – Uh, pun not intended. So, like I asked before, what’re we all doin’ exactly?”

???: “ *No one has checked the beach yet* .”

Hayasaka, confused at the new voice, looked around for the source, until he heard Kaidou gasp and point towards the front entrance of the hotel.

Kaidou: “Saiki…! W-We should go follow him! C’mon!”

Still shaken, but attempting to keep himself afloat, Hayasaka followed the group over to the beach. There, he skidded to a halt, frozen in place as he stared upon the unanticipated sight.

Mai: “The boat…!”

Bojack: “What the hell happened to it?”

Kurumada: “It’s been burnt to a damn crisp!”

Kaidou: “A-Ah… *G-Guys* …”

Latte: “Kaidou? What’s the matter, sweetheart…?”

L: “...Perhaps you should all take a look at what’s beside the boat.”

Hayasaka: (“Beside it? What does he…”)

Hayasaka's heart stopped.

An unfamiliar reaction arose within his stomach: a woozy, nauseating, horrible, painful feeling. Like someone had punched him in the gut, forcing any and all dignity inside him to be churned out in a single blow. Like he had been denied any sort of humanity in this one agonising moment. Like he'd never be the same after this ever again. Even if he somehow managed to completely forget the sight in front of him.

Something about this was enough to make him lose it all.

…

[BDA]

…

Lying face up in the sand, the waves of the muted grey ocean gently lapping at his cold, violated body, was *Walter White* .

And he was dead.

Walter White was dead.

Chapter End Notes

My name is Walter Hartwell White. I live at 308 Negra Aroya Lane, Albuquerque, New Mexico--

Walter really fell over like in Ozymandias huh?

OK OK OK ALL JOKES ASIDE FIRST MURDER HOLY SHIT

I wonder who the killer could be...?

Also as you can see, the 'Monokuma Theatres' have been rightfully replaced with 'Monotora Files', lil' snippets of Monotora's production created by Rexx!

Chapter 1: Blue Sky Sinking (Deadly Life)

Chapter Notes

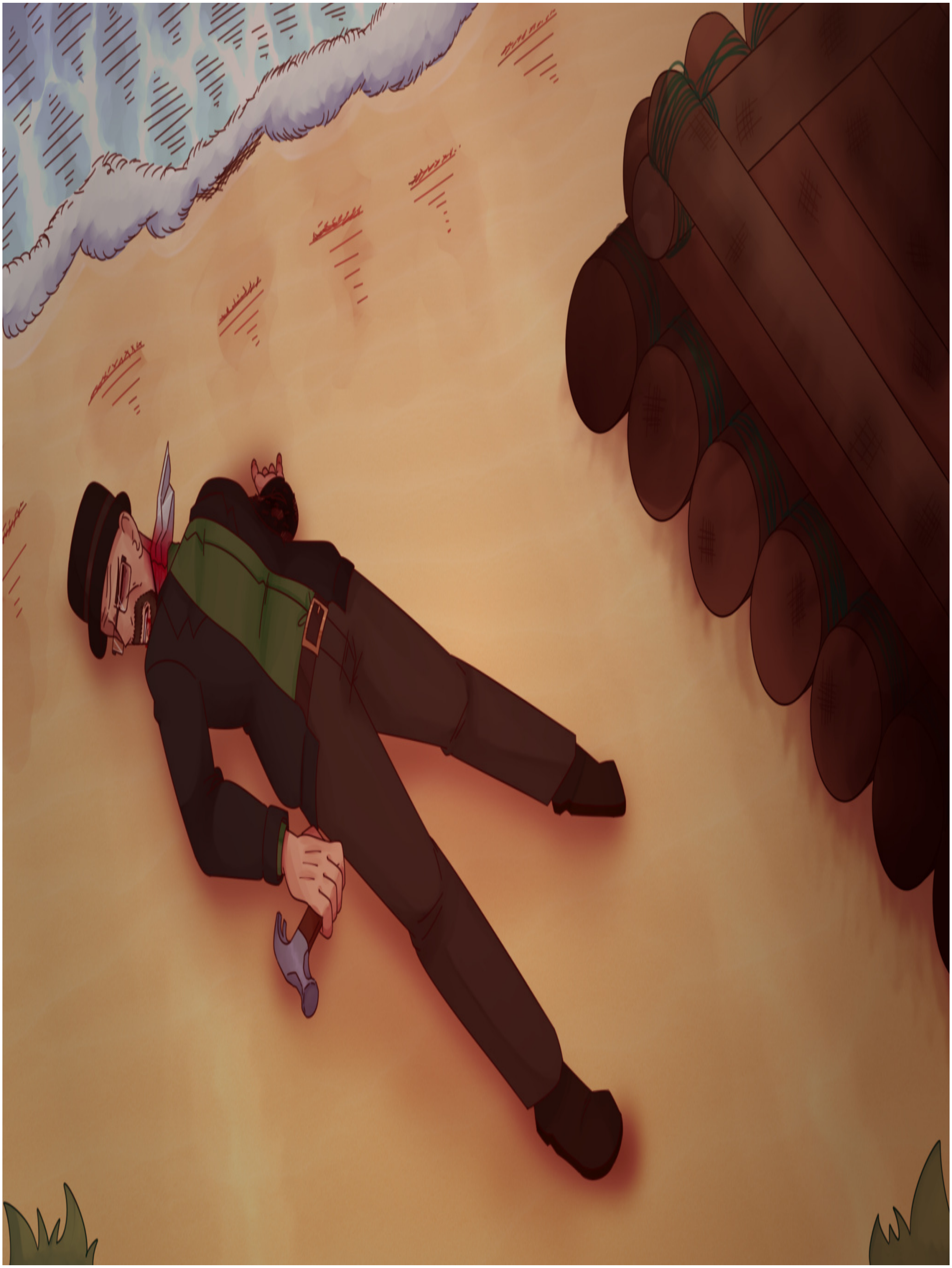
> So then, our story only continues on as the rest of the mystery gang are forced to figure out who killed funny meth man...
>
> Not much to say here, except I'm surprised my fingers aren't dead. Why do I say this? Well, you'll just have to find out soon, hehe...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayasaka had gone his entire daily life never witnessing anything more graphic than a minor injury or two. Gore-packed movies were never his fancy, and feel-bad news articles thankfully never caught his eye. Even when studying medicine, he had never come across an autopsy before. He just never needed to. Him and death were like two different paths: a sentence that had never been spoken.

That is, until today, where he found himself standing face to face with a real life corpse.

Hayasaka had never imagined the dead would look so similar to someone sleeping. Sooner or later, he'd think Walter will get up and carry on with his day like he usually did. But, he knew that was impossible – because he was *dead* .



DING DONG, BING BONG

As a new chime infiltrated his ears, Hayasaka was forced to snap back to what had become his new horrible reality.

Monotora: "Well would ya look at that, a fresh piece of prey has been found! Well to you all, who’ve never eaten a single human before in your lives, it's just a dead body to you. As this event has been triggered, you all have a certain amount of time to gather up as much evidence as possible before the executive trial! Head to the beach for you coworkers who are miles away from the old dead guy."

Following the orders of the announcement, Hayasaka soon noticed the remaining members of the group trickle onto the beach and having the displeasure of hearing each and every one of their contempt, disgusted reactions.

Natsuki: “T-Thats…! Oh my god, I’m gonna–!”

Yuri: “Ah, p-please don’t throw up! Just look away from the… *t-that* . Uuu…”

Ena: “Cheese and rice! The man with the hat and glasses has left our realm of existence!”

Jesse: “Hey, what the hell’s goin’ on? Who died?!”

Jesse, pushing past the crowd, froze in place as he finally caught an eyeful of Walter’s corpse.

Jesse: “...M…Mr. White…? MR. WHITE!”

Dashing towards him and diving down onto the sand, Jesse held Walter against him as he attempted to frantically shake him awake.

Jesse: “Mr. White! Y-You gotta get up, yo! Get up…! C’mon… C-C’mon… Why ain’t you saying anything?! MR. WHITE, PLEASE!”

Everyone stood in silence, looking on at the agonising sight. Jesse continued to beg for Walter to awaken, tears spilling from his eyes like the ocean’s tide crashing and swirling at the shore. Hayasaka felt something inside him tug, making his throat pile up with a heaviness that denied him any sort of comfort.

Jesse: “...No… N-No… Why you… *hic* , why did you…”

Soon enough, Jesse’s voice gave in from the wailing, and all he could do was sit there in stillness, sobbing over the body in his arms. Latte was the first to move, kneeling down next to Jesse and rubbing soothing circles against his back. Next was L, who stopped just before Walter’s body and peered down, causing Jesse to glare up at him in confusion.

Jesse: “W-What…?”

L: “...I’m glad you didn’t tamper too much with the original state of his body. We’ll still be able to properly investigate him in that case.”

Jesse: “ *What* ? Is that–is that all you care about? The fucking *investigation* ?! Does that brain of yours have no sympathy or something?! Don’t you care that he *died* ?!”

L: “I *do* care. Because someone went ahead and did *it* .”

Bojack: “ *It* ? What the hell is he talking about?”

Yuri: “... *Murder* .”

L: “Indeed. It appears that someone here has murdered Walter: the condition that will let them escape the island if they are to get away with it. Quite brutally as well, it seems.”

Natsuki: “Wait, are you serious?! No way… T-That’s…!”

Kaidou: “E-Eh?! But, none of us would do that! No one would kill anyone!”

Hayasaka: (“...I can’t believe it. I really can’t. The idea of the death game has finally sunk into reality. So much so, that someone really killed Walter. H-Haha… have I truly gone insane?”)

Jesse: “...Who did it then? Who the *fuck* killed him?!”

Latte: “Jesse, calm down–”

Jesse: “No! One of you bastards killed Mr. White–and don’t think I’m gonna sit here and take this lightly! I’m gonna fucking kill you – whoever you are!”

Kurumada: “Oi, Oi, calm the fuck down, will ya? What you’re sayin’ is irrational – there’s no way in hell the killer’s gonna out themselves.”

L: “Yes, and your shouting isn’t going to help solve the case any quicker. You’re better off saving your energy for something more useful.”

Jesse: “Screw you…”

Jesse hung his head as he stared at Walter, unwilling to fight any longer on the topic.

Monotora: “Mwehe! I hope I’m not late to the party!”

Just then, Monotora pounced onto the beach, swishing their tail in delight.

Monotora: “I can see the initial shock has died down. Creatures like you seem to go on forever with your… ‘grief’, or whatever the hell you call it. Although, I must admit how fun it is to watch how vulnerable you become."

Natsuki: "Hey, island rep, or whatever the hell! Someone's freaking dead! Aren't you gonna do something about it?!"

Monotora: "And what makes you think I need to do something? It's been made very clear it's up to you all to investigate the blackened behind the crime."

Brian: "A-About that… Um, how *are* we supposed to investigate?"

Monotora: "That's up to YOU, dumbass! Well, unless you intended to give up immediately and allow the killer the victory, kehe."

Jesse: "Is that what you wanted to do…?"

Brian: "N-No! I-I was just asking!"

Monotora: "Ahaha! Oh, I just can't stop messing with you all! I'm actually obligated by Nesos to send out a basic report to your tablets to ensure that everyone starts off fair n' square. Well then, that's all I'm supposed to let ya know, so I have no need to stand around any longer."

L: "Before you leave, I would like to hear you confirm that someone present is definitely the blackened."

Monotora: "Yeah, yeah! There's sure as hell a killer amongst ya as I speak! Kehehe!"

Springing off, Monotora left the group in their heavy uncertainty.

L: "Well then, you heard the tiger. We only have so much time until the aforementioned trial begins, so I would recommend you all split up and search around the scene. Make sure not to tamper with any of the evidence, however."

Natsuki: “What the? That’s way too fast! I can’t just start investigating yet!”

Yuri: “M-Mm, me too. I’m still in far too much shock to do anything… I don’t even believe I *could* do anything, really…”

Hiroshi: “Regardless, standing around won’t further us, either…”

Mai: “...Even so, we are to try our hardest, aren’t we? Walter was the only one to take leadership in the first place, so it’s only fair we carry on under the same circumstance.”

Hayasaka: (“Mai…?”)

Mai: “Without his idea to build that boat, we would’ve surely been in more of a panic than where we are right now. He aided us, and now we must aid him.”

Latte: “I agree with Mai. Walter was such a great role model towards the group. I wish to find his killer only for his efforts in helping us keep calm throughout the past few days. I bet you feel the same, don’t you Jesse?”

Jesse nodded after a beat of silence.

Jesse: “...Yeah. Without Mr. White, I ‘prolly would’ve done next to jack on this island. So, everyone better do their part and search as much as possible, or else…”

A small uncertain smile flashed on Jesse for merely a moment, before he looked down at Walter once again.

Retsuko: “I would like to help, but what should we do…?”

L: “You can begin by scoping out the scene, of course. Jesse, may you let go of Walter now? I would like to start by analysing his body.”

Jesse begrudgingly slipped his arms out from under Walter, placing him gently back onto the sand.

Jesse: “...I don’t care what you do, but I’m not leaving his side no matter what.”

Bojack: “I’ll stand with you if you want. I’m not good at investigating things. Well I am, but not murder. I’ve never investigated a murder before. Why would I have? Anyway, as much as I think death is arbitrary and sulking over a corpse won’t change anything, I know it’s probably for the best that you let out your grief.”

Jesse: “...Uh, thanks, I guess…”

And with that, the group eventually began to separate around the beach. Hayasaka noticed Kurumada turn to him out of the corner of his eye.

Kurumada: “Hey, uh, how’re you doing?”

Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m fine. I can’t focus on my fear right now – I have to do my part too.”

Kurumada: “Well, you don’t have to do it alone. C’mon, I’ll help ya out in your investigation. Sure, I mean, I ain’t the brightest, y’know that, but two heads are always better than one.”

Hayasaka: “I suppose you have a point. I’d feel more safe confiding in a second opinion anyway, haha. How about you, Mai? …M-Mai?”

Kurumada: “Looks like she’s already wandered off with that Latte lady. She just won’t leave her alone, eh?”

Hayasaka: (“I feel like we’re in a similar situation right now, however… Nevermind. It’s fine. Me and Kurumada will have to do. I don’t mind this, anyway. Well then, let’s begin…”)

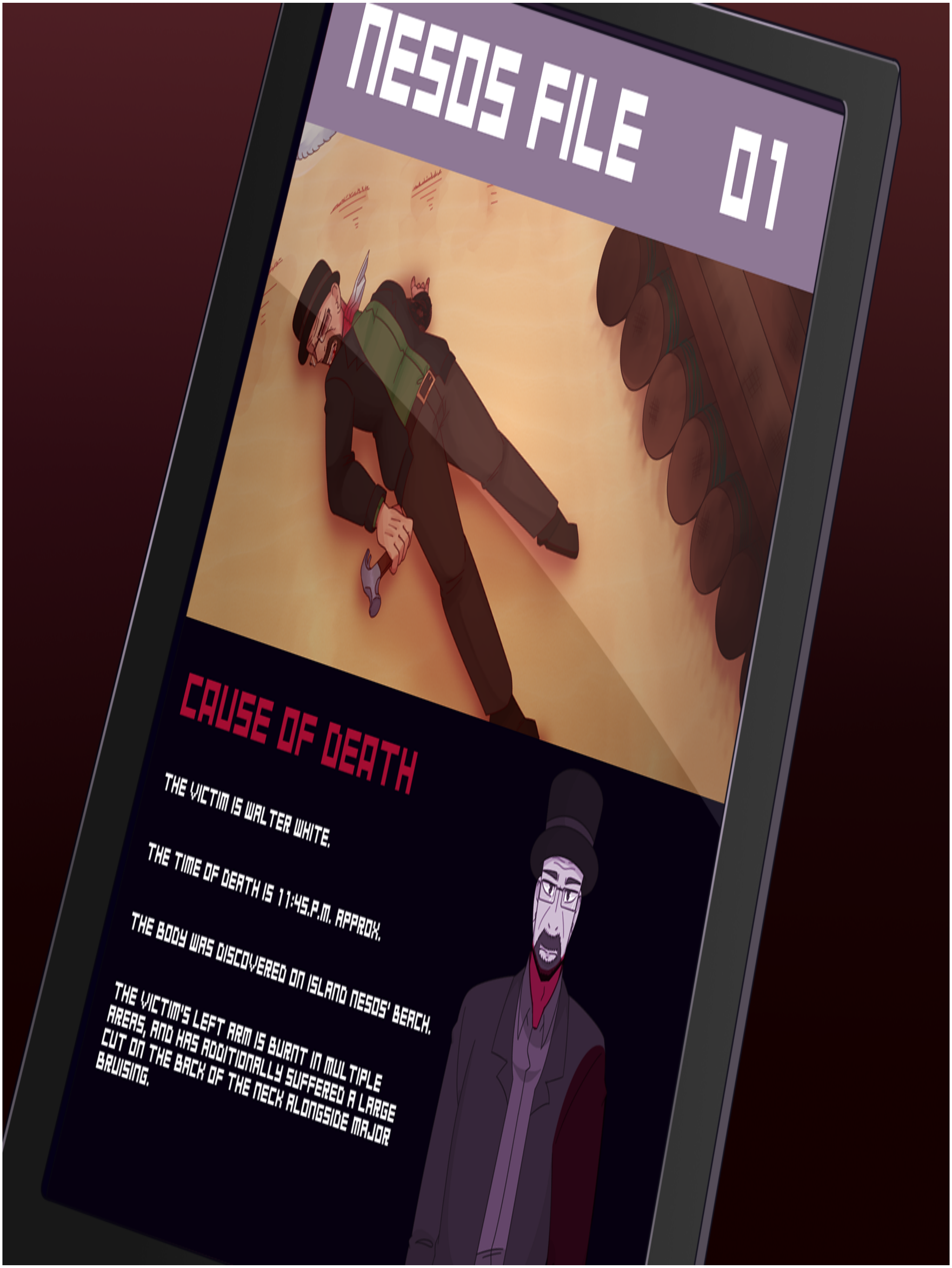
INVESTIGATION

Kurumada: “So, what'dya wanna look at first?”

Hayasaka: “I remember Monotora mentioned something about sending a file to our tablets? Should we take a look at that?”

Kurumada: “Sure thing.”

Retrieving the tablet in his pocket, Hayasaka noticed a new section had been added to the menu labelled ‘Nesos File’. Tapping on the icon, he was met with an image of Walter that highlighted his injuries, alongside a short paragraph feeding basic information on the murder.



NESOS FILE 01

CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS WALTER WHITE.

THE TIME OF DEATH IS 11:45.P.M. APPROX.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED ON ISLAND NESOS' BEACH.

THE VICTIM'S LEFT ARM IS BURNT IN MULTIPLE AREAS, AND HAS ADDITIONALLY SUFFERED A LARGE CUT ON THE BACK OF THE NECK ALONGSIDE MAJOR BRUISING.

The victim is Walter White. The time of death is 11:45.P.M. approx. The body was discovered on Island Nesos' Beach. The victim's left arm is burnt in multiple areas, and has additionally suffered a large cut on the back of the neck alongside major bruising.

Kurumada: "Looks like he died just before nighttime hours."

Hayasaka: "If the murder took place at the beach, then the killer had managed to murder Walter before Monotora was let loose."

Kurumada: "Wait, then why didn't Monotora try n' like, poke at Walter's body or whatever? I mean, his corpse would've been left out in the open, right?"

Hayasaka: "Maybe they're not allowed to tamper with corpses? The death game is the vital reason why we're here after all… A-As much as I hate to say that."

Kurumada: "Okay, and why didn't it say how he died then?"

Hayasaka: "Well, we can't be given the answer so easily now, can we? Haha…"

Kurumada: "No, I mean the file doesn't state a cause of death. Just a bunch of injuries and shit."

Hayasaka: "What…?"

Hayasaka reread the file. To his surprise, Kurumada was correct.

Hayasaka: "Ah, that's… I-I wonder if that's just how it's meant to be written. We wouldn't know, since this is the first time any of us have ever seen such a thing."

Kurumada: "Dammit… This is gonna be harder than I thought."

Hayasaka: “That doesn’t mean the file isn’t important. This has to be factual, or else what would be the point of it? So, I believe we should keep it in mind.”

Kurumada: “Guess you got a point there.”

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File #1

Kurumada: “What now? Wanna see if we can try and perform some kinda make-shift autopsy on Walter? I mean, you know all about medicine and shit.”

Hayasaka: “Um… C-Can we really just… walk up to a corpse and inspect it for the first time? I-It’s not as if I’m a professional or anything…”

Kurumada: “... *Shit* . I get it. Nevermind then. Wanna go check out what happened to the boat instead?”

Hayasaka: “I’m better off with that. We should also ask around about it, seeing as neither of us were on the boat production team.”

Walking towards the burnt boat, Hayasaka noticed a few had already set up their investigation there: Natsuki, Yuri, and Retsuko.

Hayasaka: “Oh, those three were on the team, weren’t they…?”

Kurumada: “Yeah. Hey, you guys, can ya give us some context on this boat? Like, how was the production and all that?”

Retsuko: “As far as I remember, everything worked out smoothly. We all just followed Walter’s instructions on how to lay everything out.”

Natsuki: “I mean, yeah, apart from the lack of breaks. It was hell suffering through all that manual labour in this heat.”

Hayasaka: “Had anyone shown any ill will against the boat idea at any stage?”

Natsuki: “No. Even though I was mad, I would never want to destroy our only ticket out of here, you know? Ugh, but now all our hard work has been for nothing! And we can’t even leave anymore!”

Yuri: “Ah, Natsuki, i-it’s okay… I myself wasn’t all that excited to ride the boat. In the worst case scenario, it could’ve broken, and we would’ve all drowned in the middle of the ocean…”

Hayasaka: “T-That’s very… Um…”

Yuri: “I-I’m sorry! I let my mind drift too far trying to help console her…!”

Hayasaka: “T-Thank you for your input, anyway…”

Kurumada: “Still, it didn’t help us figure out how the boat was set on fire in the first place, and why…”

Scanning around, Hayasaka spotted Brian a little ways over from the boat, staring at a pile of burnt wood. He gestured to Kurumada, and the two walked over to him.

Hayasaka: “What’re you doing, Brian?”

Brian: “O-Oh! Um, Hayasaka… I was just curious about this wood pile. After construction, there was some leftover wood that was kept in this pile here. But for some reason, it’s also burnt…”

Kurumada: “Maybe whoever set the boat on fire just happened to set light to everythin’ in the process?”

Hayasaka: “I’m a little unsure of that… I-I mean, the two aren’t all that close to each other. If the boat was set on fire, is there any point in burning the wood also?”

Brian: “I wonder who set the boat on fire in the first place…”

Kurumada: “ *That’s* what we’re try’na figure out.”

Hayasaka: “Brian, do you have any ideas…?”

Brian: “I’m sorry, I really have no idea. Everyone looked so eager to have a way to escape the island, even me.”

Hayasaka: (“That is true… I doubt anyone here would want to sabotage our only means of escape, and yet…”) “Let’s keep a note of this, Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “It ain’t a lot, but something is better than nothing.”

Truth bullet obtained: Burnt Boat and Wood Pile

Kurumada: “Well, where d’ya wanna head next?”

Hayasaka turned around, and noticed a certain two ladies sifting through the aluminium case left on the sand. They decided to go over to them.

Kurumada: “Found anything over here?”

Mai: “It’s strange that this case is open, hm? There was only one key to open this case, but it was always on Walter.”

Hayasaka: “The case is open? Does that mean Walter opened it?”

Latte: “But does that make any sense? I feel like the killer stole the key off him somehow.”

Mai: “It appears that none of the tools have been removed, though. If they were, you could easily tell the replaced one would be all shiny and clean since the rest of the tools are covered in sawdust. Granted that the killer needed to clean the tool, of course.”

Hayasaka: (“S-She’s awfully good at this, haha…”)

Kurumada: “Does it matter, anyway? What if the case was left open the previous night? It’d be fair game for anyone then.”

Mai: “I wouldn’t believe so. Walter made sure to lock the case every night after we all cleared away the tools, and last night was no exception.”

Hayasaka: “Then, during whatever occurred at the murder, the case was opened by either Walter or the killer, but no tools were removed…?”

Kurumada: “Sounds kinda anticlimactic, eh?”

Hayasaka: (“I-I guess we’ll have to see…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Open Aluminium Tool Case

???: “KYAAA!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?!”

Upon hearing the high-pitched yelp, the four turned around to see Hiroshi, Saiki and Kaidou, the latter of which hopping on one foot and grabbing onto the other with a pained expression. Latte was quick to rush towards his side.

Latte: “Kaidou! Are you alright?”

Kaidou: “I-I’m hit! Dark Reunion has found me and struck me from the foot! My achilles foot!”

Saiki: “ *It’s heel, you idiot…* ”

Hiroshi: “Although, foot appears to be more fitting here. Perhaps his quip was more witty than we thought.”

Latte: “What struck your foot, Kaidou?”

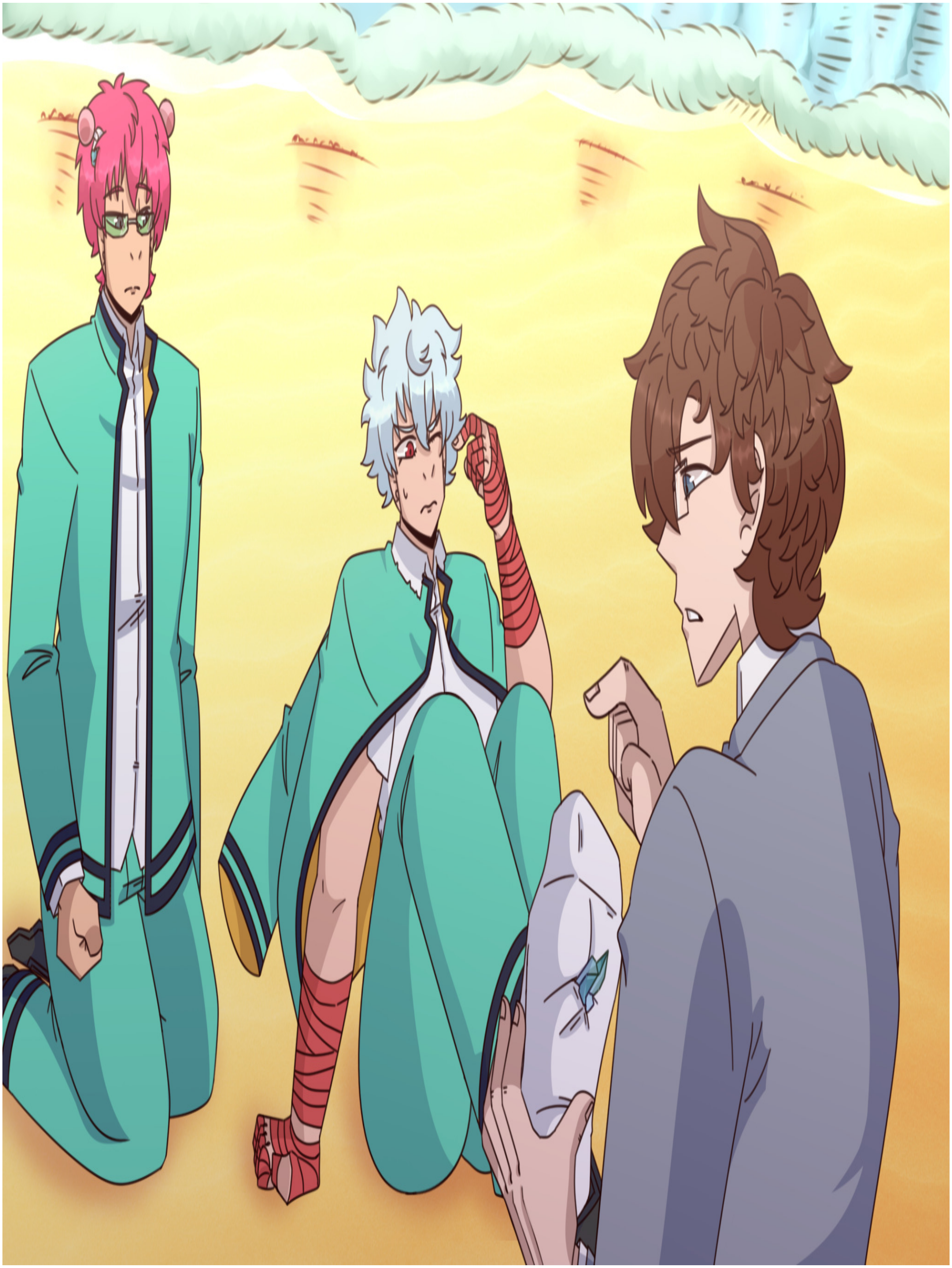
Kaidou: “I-I stepped on something sharp while I was investigating, and it must’ve pierced through my shoe and into my foot…!”

Kurumada: “Baha, seriously? Ya gotta be more careful walkin’ around in those puny school shoes, kid.”

Kaidou: “Uuu…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I can take a look at it if you want. I have a medical background, so you can trust me, haha…”

Kaidou nodded, and sat down on the sand as Hayasaka knelt down to remove his shoe and take a look at the injury.



Latte: “What were you doing beforehand, Kaidou?”

Hiroshi: “Saiki and I were following Kaidou’s command, who had claimed we should spend our time searching around in the sand.”

Kaidou: “Everyone dismisses the sand, you see! It’s the place you least expect as it’s everywhere below us, and that’s why it makes for the perfect hiding spot! No need to thank my genius, heheh.”

Saiki: “ *Are you a pirate or something* ?”

Hayasaka: “...I-I think I’ve found what you must’ve stepped on. There appears to be a small shard of glass lodged into your foot…”

Kurumada: “Alright, well just pull it out then.”

Kaidou: “W-W-Wait! No! D-Don’t do that!!”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, the glass isn’t lodged in that far, so it should be removed by hand fairly easily…”

Kaidou: “I-I dunno… I mean, I’m not scared or anything, b-but what if, um, it causes a shift in reality?”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Saiki: “ *Let go of his foot* .”

Hayasaka did so, as Saiki knelt down in his place.

Kaidou: “Ah, Saiki, I knew you’d take my side on this!”

But as suddenly as he grabbed Kaidou's foot, Saiki picked the glass out clean himself, causing Kaidou to shriek once more and emotionally hug onto him.

Kaidou: "O-Ow! Saiki! Why did you do that?! Uuuu…!"

Saiki: " *Good grief. You're being overdramatic…* "

Kurumada: "So why'da even happen to step on glass in the first place?"

Mai: "Oh, yes. What was glass doing in the sand, anyhow?"

Saiki: " *I don't know, but there's a whole bunch of shards lying around.* "

Hiroshi: "Oh, I do believe you're correct."

Hiroshi picked up a shard lying in the sand, the sun bouncing off the surface and making it shine in different hues.

Kaidou: "Huh? Then why didn't you say anything before?!"

Latte: "Kaidou, why don't I take you off the beach for a little while? We can sit over there on the path."

Kaidou: "O-Okay… Saiki! Hiroshi! You two must keep investigating while I heal from my injury!"

Saiki: " *That can hardly be called an injury…* "

Hayasaka: ("These shards… They're rather strange, aren't they? I don't believe they were here before, or else someone would've already stepped on one. In that case, it's best that I keep a note of them.")

Truth bullet obtained: Small Glass Shards

Mai: "Oh, what a shame. Latte has been taken away from me…"

Kurumada: "As if you weren't already with her 24/7 anyway."

Hiroshi: "Actually, there's still a reason why you should talk to Kaidou and Latte."

Hayasaka: "Oh…?"

Hiroshi: "Kaidou, Latte, Ena and I were all training in the sports centre around the timeframe of the murder. If you would like a proper alibi, I propose you should hear the claim from all of us."

Kurumada: "That's certainly one way to save your backs."

Mai: "So we can go back over to Latte? Mwehe! Everything has appeared to work out well in the end!"

The small group walked over to Kaidou and Latte, who had just sat down on the path's edge facing out into the beach.

Latte: "Hello, again! What brings you all here so suddenly?"

Hayasaka: "U-Um, Kaidou, could you care to explain what your, ah, 'training session' was about last night?"

Kaidou: “Oh! I see you’ve taken an interest in our training, huh? Heheh, you see, seeing as it was our supposed final night before my team were to go up against the mighty Monotora to aid the weak in escaping on the boat, I took it upon myself to set up a late-night session from 10P.M. to 12A.M.”

Kurumada: “And did anything significant happen durin’ that time? Did anyone happen to leave at all?”

Kaidou: “No, no one had left under my watchful eye. However… something weird did happen.”

Hayasaka: “What was it?”

Kaidou: “Moony, Ena’s companion, began to rant how ‘high and mighty’ we thought we were, even though we were ‘definitely going to be beaten up by Monotora’. I, of course, wouldn’t listen to a single word of that spheil… b-but, Ena took it to heart, and they became really upset and broke out into a fit of sadness. It wasn’t like the sadness we’ve seen before: they turned completely grey, and we had to stop our training to calm them down.”

Hayasaka: (“Ena can really do that? That seems a little dangerous, even for three people to have to handle…”)

Kaidou: “But the Jet Black Wings never backs away from a challenge! Even if it seemed to go on forever, ‘cuz I had no idea how to calm them down…”

Hiroshi: “If I must be truthful, it was rather troublesome. If only they had been more diligent in informing us about their emotional outbreaks, then we wouldn't have to have dealt with such an event…”

Latte: “However, in the end when Ena did revert back to their usual self, they were very polite and apologetic about the whole thing!”

Kaidou: “As the whole thing kinda hindered our session, I got a little afraid that we weren’t prepared enough for the next day. N-Naturally, I would be worried as the leader, you know? Since it kept me up, I guess that’s why I had woken up so late this morning…”

Saiki: “ *If you didn’t put such a responsibility on your shoulders, then you would’ve never had to stress in the first place…* ”

Kurumada: “Everyone seemed to be pretty stressed out the previous night anyway, on top of the motive n’ all…”

Hayasaka: “Hm… Um, well, thank you for the account, Kaidou.”

Truth bullet obtained: Kaidou’s Account

Kaidou: “Well then, you two better keep investigating in my honour!”

Hiroshi: “Are you alright to continue investigating with me, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *It’ll be much quieter without Kaidou with us, at least* …”

Latte: “Hang on – Kaidou, you forgot about the smoke.”

Kaidou: “H-Huh? What smoke?”

Latte: “Oh, I suppose you weren’t able to smell it then…”

Mai: “What’re you talking about, Latte?”

Latte: “Since my weaknesses are heat and water, I need to keep all my senses on guard for them. I’m actually pretty good at detecting smoke from a large distance away.”

Mai: “Ooo! That’s such an excellent talent~!”

Kurumada: “ *Tch* …”

Hayasaka: “What exactly did you detect last night then?”

Latte: “It was about half an hour before our training session finished, when I had begun to smell faint smoke. I originally dismissed it as my attention was focused on sorting out the fight between Ena and Moony, and so I simply assumed it was coming from the kitchen at the time.”

Hayasaka: “So… that would have to be around 11:30P.M., right?”

Kurumada: “Guess that was when the boat was set on fire then, considerin’ that would’ve been the only thing to produce a ton of smoke. Still, I don’t fuckin’ understand why the boat has anything to do with the murder…”

Hayasaka: “I-In any case, thank you for the extra information, Latte.”

Latte: “I’m happy to be of help!”

Truth bullet obtained: Latte’s Account

Kurumada: “Alright… Can we finally go look somewhere else now? Time’s runnin’ out.”

Mai: “Mm, I think I’m going to stick around with Latte and Kaidou, hehe.”

Kurumada: “Fine with me.”

Much to Hayasaka’s unanticipated reaction, Kurumada had grabbed onto his wrist and dragged him away.

Hayasaka: “H-Hey…! Kurumada, is there anything wrong with Mai making a friend? I-I thought you weren’t going to be mad at her for it…”

Kurumada: “I ain’t! I just–I don’t care what she does–I mean I do, but since she keeps goin’ on about it, I’m gettin’ annoyed.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...I’m not–I’m not mad, alright? I’m just… stressed, is all.”

Hayasaka: “...Alright. As long as you don’t lash out. Let’s just keep looking around, okay?”

Glancing around the scene in the hopes to find something to occupy himself with before he would have to suck it up and check out the body, Hayasaka noticed Ena standing by the ocean shore. Him and Kurumada decided to walk up to them.

Kurumada: “Hey, what’re you doing over here?”

Ena: “Salutations! Or should I say I am sorry for our loss? Hm, this is turning out to be quite the odd funeral…”

Hayasaka: (“Do they think this is a funeral…?”)

Ena: “To answer your question, the ocean is a very lovely place! I have chosen to spend my time here to keep myself calm in such a stressful situation.”

Hayasaka: (“Remembering what Kaidou said earlier about Ena’s outburst, it’s obvious how easily swayed Ena’s emotions can be. I honestly feel rather bad for them…”)

Ena: “Would you two care to join me in staring out into the endless ocean?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well…”

Kurumada: “So what you’re tellin’ me is that you’ve found nothing so far?”

Ena: “I’m not entirely fishing for physical evidence, more so any vibes I am able to receive. Perhaps the ocean knows a thing or two – they are a witness to the event after all!”

Kurumada: “Argh, this is–outta my way!”

Kurumada slipped off his sandals, pushing his way past as he started to walk out into the sea.

Kurumada: “I’ll do your damn job for you…”

Raising a brow, Hayasaka watched as Kurumada searched around the ankle-deep water he was currently in. Eventually, he shifted his eyes lower down to focus on the softly lapping waves to see if it would help him to wind down.

Hayasaka: “...S-So, ah, Ena, where is Moony?”

Ena: “Not to worry! Moony is simply sleeping inside my pocket. Perhaps she is playing a nocturnal game?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, um, okay then…?”

Kurumada: “GAH–!”

Hayasaka immediately whipped his head over to Kurumada upon hearing his shout, only to see him gripping onto one foot: a very similar position to how Kaidou was a little while ago.

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada…!”

He sped out into the sea to his aid, disregarding how his shoes were now soaked by the salty water.

Hayasaka: “W-What happened?”

Kurumada: “Dammnit! I must’ve stepped on somethin’ sharp!”

Hayasaka: “S-Sharp…?”

Kurumada then bent down to pick up something in the water, and retrieved a plastic bag full of sharp edges poking and prodding out of every which side. Cocking a brow, he ripped it open to reveal a pile of large glass shards.

Kurumada: “What the hell?!”

Hayasaka: “ *Talk about karma* …”

Hayasaka carefully picked up one of the shards, examining it in the sunlight.

Hayasaka: “Ah, wait a moment. This colour… the blue-green tint is awfully similar to the smaller shards we found lying around in the sand, right? That means the glass is one in the same.”

With a force of irritation, Kurumada chucked the bag onto the shore.

Kurumada: “So why the hell’s there a bag of glass *and* a bunch’a shards in the sand?”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not entirely sure myself, but I can guess that someone was trying to discard the large shards by putting them in that bag and throwing it into the ocean. Therefore, this is probably important…”

Truth bullet obtained: Bag of Glass Shards

As Hayasaka pondered a little longer on the matter, he noticed Kurumada stomp back to shore and put his sandals back on. He promptly caught up with him, and gestured to his foot.

Hayasaka: “A-Are you sure you don’t need any medical attention on that?”

Kurumada: “I swear to you I’m fine. It was barely a scratch. We gotta carry on investigatin’ anyway.”

Hayasaka gently nodded, but felt a wave of anxiety pass over him as he realised there wasn’t much else to gawk at anymore.

Kurumada: “...Look, the only place we haven’t looked yet is Walter’s body.”

Hayasaka: “Ah jeeze, d-do we really have to…?”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka, I know you’ve got this. Surely it won’t be so bad, yeah?”

Hayasaka: “... *sigh* , alright…”

Accompanied over to the body by Kurumada, Hayasaka caught sight of Jesse kneeling beside Walter. He appeared a lot calmer than before, but there was a sign of sombreness etched on his blank face. Jesse neglected to even peer up at them, almost as if his senses had become numb to the world around him, only focusing on Walter.

Kurumada: “We’ve come to take a look over the body, if that’s alright with ya.”

L: “Go right ahead. I’d appreciate a few perspectives on the scene.”

Jesse: "..."

Hayasaka: "..."

Hayasaka faltered to move. He glanced over towards Kurumada, who in turn gave him a reassuring look. Taking a deep breath, he kneeled down before Walter's head. The initial wound he chose to examine first was the large cut in Walter's neck, if not for the glass prominently sticking out from the gnash that caught his attention.

Hayasaka: ("If I recall what the Nesos file said, this must be the 'large cut on the back of his neck'. Perhaps it is the fatal wound…?")

L: "You are assuming the fatal wound is the glass, am I correct?"

Hayasaka: "H-How… how did you know that?"

L: "Aside from the fact that you are looking at said wound currently, anyone would make such a presumption from it's odd presence alone. Although, it's not just that. The Nesos File never explicitly stated a cause of death, and therefore your first thought would be to identity as such on your own."

Hayasaka: "Oh my… Well, you're not wrong, haha…"

L: "I suspect the cause of death is a mystery that has been set up by the killer. For Nesos to keep this information classified to us, it adds a fair game for them. Rather interesting, isn't it?"

Kurumada: "Oh yeah? So, do ya think the neck wound is what killed him then?"

L: "Not likely."

Kurumada: "Huh? *That's* it?"

Bojack: “Eh. It could be a possibility. Walter could’ve slipped and fell on it. Old people slip all the time.”

Jesse: “Mr. White’s only fifty, dumbass!”

Bojack: “ *Fifty* ? I’m fifty-four! How does that… Uh, I mean, I take back what I said. Sorry. Jesus. He was younger than me?”

Hayasaka: “...B-Back onto the wound, this glass is the exact same colour as all the glass we’ve found around the beach so far. I’m assuming it's the same type.”

Kurumada: “This case and fuckin’ glass, man… Why does it keep coming up?”

Truth bullet obtained: Glass Shard in Neck

L: “Hayasaka, I recommend you look over Walter’s neck once more before moving on.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Um, okay…”

Inching his head a little closer, albeit unfavourably, Hayasaka eventually caught interest in something new.

Hayasaka: “...There appears to be bruising around his neck.”

Kurumada: “Really? D’ya think it has anythin’ to do with that glass?”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s unlikely. This wound, it’s completely different. The bruising only occurs around the neck, and nowhere else. I can’t see anything behind his ears, nor any other types of marks…”

L: “Hm, perfect. Thank you for confirming my suspicions, Hayasaka.”

Jesse: “What suspicions?”

L: “...Everyone should be allowed to keep an open mind. It’s not wise to have a linear mindset.”

Jesse: “Argh…”

Hayasaka: (“No matter the case, Walter definitely experienced some sort of trauma around the neck. I’ll have to keep it in mind.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bruises on Neck

Eyes faintly drifting upwards, Hayasaka stopped at Walter’s mouth and raised a brow.

Hayasaka: “Bleeding out the mouth…?”

Jesse: “H-Huh?”

Kurumada: “I mean, that makes sense, right? That giant piece of glass must’ve made him cough up blood and shit.”

Hayasaka: “No, that’s–that’s not how it works… Something like this is usually from internal bleeding, not external wounds…”

Jesse: “...”

Kurumada: “Y’know, for some who desperately didn’t wanna investigate a corpse, ya sure know what you’re talkin’ about, baha.”

Hayasaka: “H-Haha… *And I still don’t want to*…”

Truth bullet obtained: Blood on Walter’s Mouth

Bojack: “Hey, Jesse, you look kinda pale. Want me to grab you a drink or something? Not because I also wanted one or anything.”

Kurumada: “Ya sure love your morning drinkin’...”

Bojack: “It’s not my fault this time, alright? I keep smelling rum around here…”

Hayasaka: “W-What do you mean?”

Bojack: “You can’t smell it? Ever since I got here, I’ve been sniffing it non-stop.”

L took a whiff around the area.

L: “Hm… it appears that you are correct. There’s a faint alcohol scent wafting around. Perhaps you were able to easily detect it, considering your… fascination with it.”

Bojack: “That was probably the nicest way of saying ‘addiction’ I’ve ever heard.”

Hayasaka: “Was Walter ever a drinker?”

Jesse: “...I mean, yeah, he drank like, the normal amount, but he never touched a drop while he was here.”

Kurumada: “Are we sure this smell ain’t just Bojack’s breath?”

Bojack: “ *Very funny, pal* .”

Hayasaka: (“I’ll remember what he said, just in case.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bojack’s Account

Jesse: “Also, about the drink, I’m fine. I just want Hayasaka to keep checkin’ over Mr. White’s body, ‘cuz at least *he’s* actually tellin’ us what he finds.”

L: “…I take no offence to your obvious jab.”

Jesse: “Ugh…”

Hayasaka: (“Let’s see here… The Nesos File also accounted for burn marks, so…”)

Hayasaka peered over at Walter’s left arm, and winced. It was badly burnt: the surface of his jacket was ashed and a few holes bled into his skin, leaving dark, pasty marks.

Hayasaka: “...T-There’s a burn wound on his left arm. It appears to be on a large concentrated area of his arm.”

Kurumada: “Does that mean Walter was directly pushed into the fire? It could explain why there’s such a harsh mark.”

Bojack: “It would’ve been funny if half of his face was burnt off like some kind of dramatic season finale, haha.”

Jesse stared at Bojack with a cold glare, causing him to shake his head.

Bojack: “Nevermind. Sorry. Uh, again.”

Truth bullet obtained: Left Arm Burn Marks

While eyeing Walter’s body once more, Hayasaka paused at his right hand seeing how there was something in his grip.

Hayasaka: (“Is… that a hammer in his hand? That’s stange, as before, Mai said that it was unlikely any tools had been removed from the case…”) “K-Kurumada, what do you make of the hammer in Walter’s hand…?”

Kurumada: “Huh? Oh, shit. That’s weird…”

L: “Is the tool dirty in any way?”

Hayasaka: “Well, it doesn’t look to be… It’s relatively clean, actually.”

L: “Mhm…”

Hayasaka: (“If Walter has a tool on hand, does that mean he was the one to open up the case? But, since there’s no blood on it, I’m not sure if it was ever even used…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Hammer in Right Hand

L: “So then, Jesse, may I ask when and where the last time you saw Walter was?”

Jesse: “Uh, where’s this comin’ from exactly…?”

L: “I’m assuming you were the last person to be in contact with him before the murder occured, par the killer of course. It’s only logical, and I’m certain many others would’ve figured similar.”

Jesse: "...Okay, fine. I was with Mr. White most of yesterday, y'know, workin' on that boat and all that. We split up when he called us off early, and I hadn't seen him for the rest of the day."

L: "Any reason why? Not even for dinner, perhaps?"

Jesse: "Get off my case, man! I'm free to do whatever the hell I want without Mr. White. He wasn't my dad…"

Hayasaka: ("Well, if anything, *I* know that's somewhat true. I remember running into Jesse yesterday when he was looking for his lighter. Maybe that was why he wasn't with Walter? I'm not sure why Jesse hasn't brought that up, but since it's none of my business – and seeing how he's become a little hostile – I'll just keep it in mind.")

Truth bullet obtained: Jesse's Account

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "Stop whatever the hell you're doing, and listen up! The investigation period is over. I'm awfully excited, 'cuz at least one of you is gonna face punishment, kehe. Everyone should meet at Nesos Park for your next instruction. Let's hope you're all ready for what's to come next…"

Hayasaka stood up and brushed the sand off his knees, a hand creeping up to rub the back of his neck.

Hayasaka: "Oh boy, I-I hope we managed to check over everything important…"

Kurumada: "I'm sure we'll be fine. I feel like we've checked over everything I can spot, at least."

L: "Well then, it's not wise to leave the homicidal tiger in patience. Let's head over to the park."

Jesse: “I-I… I don’t wanna leave Mr. White. Not yet. Just a little longer…”

Bojack: “Don’t worry – Walter isn’t going anywhere. Literally.”

Jesse: “...”

Kurumada: “C’mon, if ya don’t leave, you won’t be able to convict his killer and give him the justice you wanna give him. Isn’t that what you said you wanted earlier?”

Jesse stared at Walter for only a moment longer, before he tore his eyes away and heaved himself up.

Jesse: “...Yeah. Guess you’re right…”

Hayasaka watched as the group began to disperse from the beach and towards the park. A nauseous sensation of uncertainty held him in place, but he forced himself to pace away from the scene to catch up with everyone else.

???: “H-Hey!”

Eyes widening, Hayasaka turned around to see Brian race towards him from the other end of the beach, only to trip up and fall face-first onto the sand with a pained groan. Hayasaka quickly rushed over to help him up.

Hayasaka: “Ah, a-are you okay, Brian?”

Brian: “U-Um, yeah. Sorry, it’s just that… I’m not quite used to beaches yet.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? What does that mean…?”

Brian: “I-It’s not important, haha…”

Hayasaka: “Why were you running in the first place?”

Brian: “Oh, well, um, I found something suspicious on the boat just as the announcement played. I wanted to check it out in more detail because no one had actually looked aboard – w-which makes sense as it was burnt and everything – but I happened to find a piece of paper – also burnt, mind you.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Brian handed over the paper, and as Hayasaka attempted to read it, the only words he could make out were ‘meet me at the beach by the boat’ and ‘or else I’ll expose your’.

Hayasaka: “This… This must have something to do with the case. The note explicitly states the location as the scene of the murder. Although I’m not sure why, but I suppose we’ll just have to find out later. I think you should keep a hold of this, Brian.”

Brian: “Alright…!”

Giving the paper back to Brian, he promptly shoved it into his briefcase.

Hayasaka: (“What a convenient mode of luggage, haha…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Burnt Piece of Paper

Kurumada: “There you are!”

Hayasaka: “Ah! K-Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “I was wonderin’ where the hell you went. Turns out ya went nowhere at all. C’mon, I don’t want you to be late.”

Hayasaka: “S-Sorry…”

The two walked over to the park, Brian following behind. When the park came into clearing, Hayasaka spotted the remainder of the group, mingling around impatiently upon the lack of Monotora.

Mai: “Hello, guys! I’m glad you didn’t get lost.”

Hayasaka: “How’s Kaidou doing?”

Mai: “Oh, he’s doing just so great! All he really needed was a quick rest and now he’s back on his feet and as energetic as usual!”

Hayasaka peered over Mai, and spotted Kaidou pestering Saiki with what he could assume was a mix of the investigation and ‘Dark Reunion’.

Natsuki: “Hello? We’re here now, Monotora! Hurry up!”

Yuri: “N-Natsuki, don’t be so rude to them. I don’t want you to get in trouble…”

Monotora: “Oh, naw! I don’t mind fightin’ a highschooler if it really came down to it! Hell, even if your limbs are frail and easy to chew my way through!”

Natsuki: “E-Eep!”

Yuri: “Don’t you dare say that to her…! I’ll never let you lay a paw on her!”

Monotora: “Jeeze, I was just jokin’. No need to get all dramatic over here. I have a more important matter to attend to, and that’s escorting you all to the trial grounds!”

Hiroshi: “What do you mean by ‘trial grounds’?”

Monotora: “The Nesos Company has been courteous enough to provide its employees a proper environment to hold a discussion about the murder, much like a real trial!”

Retsuko: “Where is it? We’ve looked around the whole island, and I’ve never seen something like that.”

Monotora gargled a nasally chuckle as they hopped a little closer to the fountain and sunk their paw down onto a cobblestone tile. Almost instantaneously, the ground rumbled with an unanticipated force, and a small area of the floor gave way to a newly formed passage leading underground.

Bojack: “Holy shit.”

Kaidou: “What is this foul play?! Hidden mechanisms? No, don’t tell me… Dark magic?!”

L: “Hm. Interesting architecture, especially for an island.”

Monotora: “Oh, ho ho! How feeble minded living creatures like you are. You can’t just accept things for how they are, hm? Ah, whatever. Follow me down here, will you?”

And just like that, Monotora had pounced down the stairs, leaving the group in a haze of uncertainty on their next move.

Kurumada: “Like hell we will. That whole thing’s downright suspicious.”

Mai: “Who’ll go down first…?”

Kaidou: “Leave this to me! I’ll venture forth first, even if there’s danger, for you can count on the Jet Black Wings!”

But as Kaidou strided towards the passage’s entrance, he paused as he peered down into the dark stairwell.

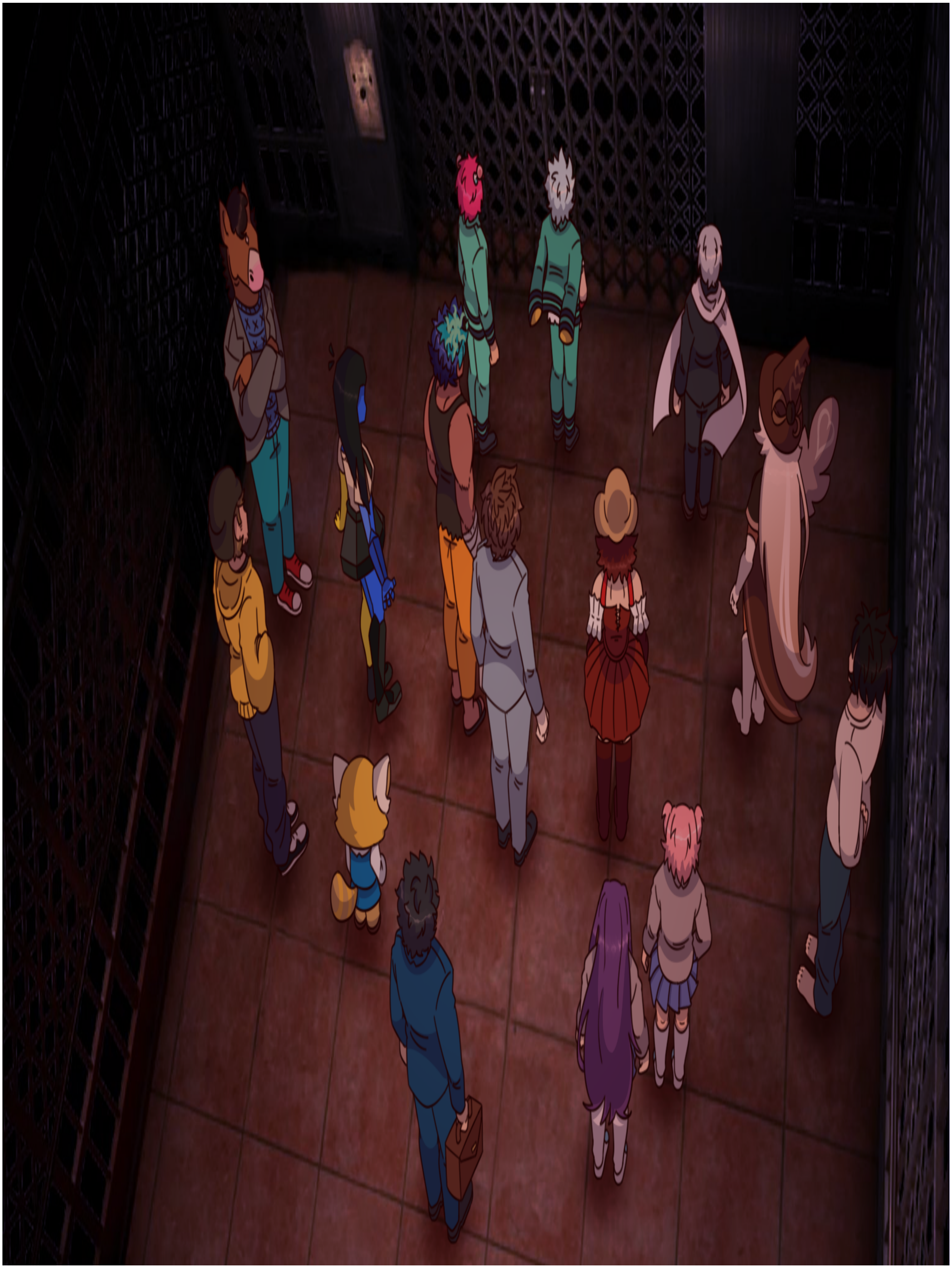
Kaidou: “..U-Um, does anyone wanna go before me? Y’know, ‘c-cuz I don’t mind if anyone wanted to and, uh–”

Jesse: “I ain’t gonna pussy around. I wanna find Mr. White’s killer for God’s sake.”

Jesse shoved past Kaidou as he sped down the stairs.

L: “We have no other choice, unless we wish to be punished.”

With a lethargic shrug, L made his way down next. After a moment, everyone else followed along, Hayasaka trailing behind Kurumada and Mai. Descending the stairs and trudging along a dimly lit corridor, they came face to face with an elevator. The doors shut just as the last person boarded, and it slowly began to plunge down.



The ride down felt excruciatingly long, at least in Hayasaka's perspective. He was unsure if it really was a long way down, or if everything had occurred up until late was making his sense of time warped and loose. Nothing could help to ground himself, apart from the cold tiles below him and the people crowded around him.

Retsuko: "U-Um, this elevator sure is taking it's time, huh?"

Bojack: "Yeah. You know, I thought I was tripping for a moment because everything so far has been so surreal. Probably the weirdest shit I've had to go through, and that's saying a lot."

Mai: "Hm, I wonder how much longer there is to go…"

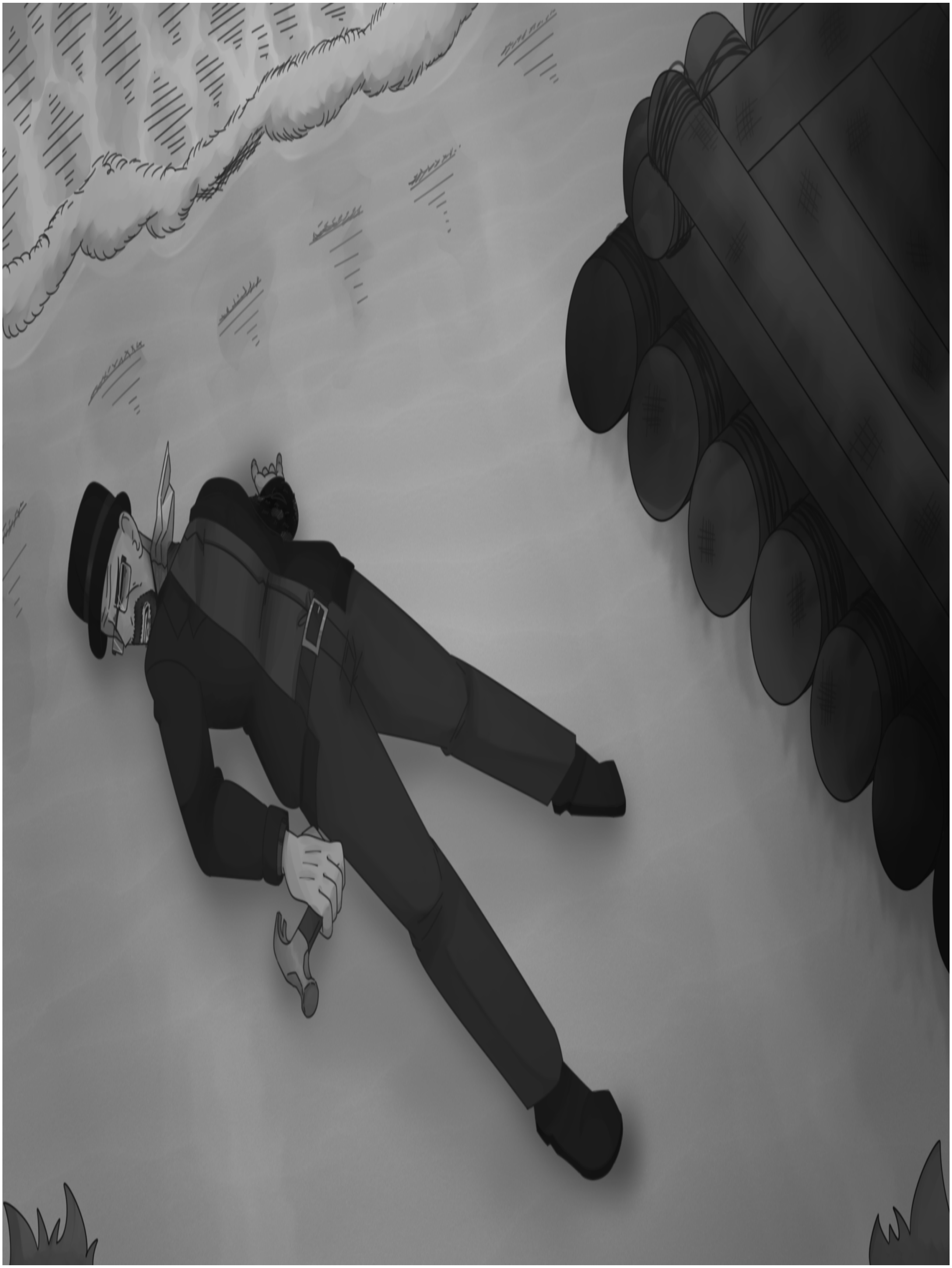
Saiki: " *It'll go a lot faster as long as you stay quiet* ."

Hayasaka wasn't aware when it exactly happened, but a loud ding snapped him out of his wavering thoughts as he realised the elevator had come to a stop and they had reached their destination: the supposed trial grounds. Viewing past the opening doors, Hayasaka took sight of a trial room that appeared to be awfully odd in nature: there was an aquarium in place of any walls, thick glass between them and all different species of fish and other sea life that danced around the pane. In the middle lay a set of podiums spaced out in a circular fashion, and a high throne on the opposite side where Monotora was impatiently sitting.

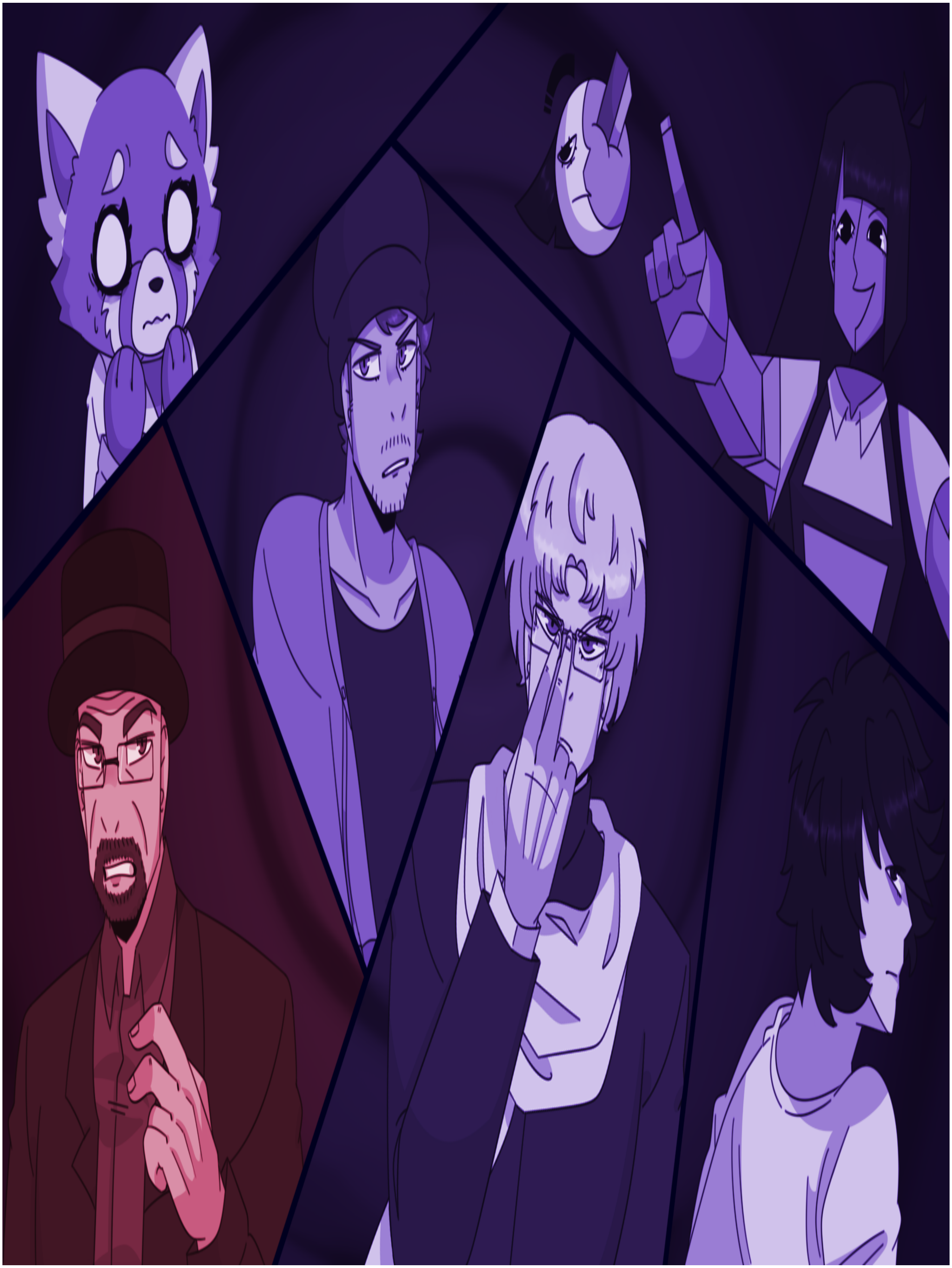
Monotora: "What took you bastards so long? Let's get to it now: get over to ya assigned podiums so we can get this trial officially underway. I advise you to clear your heads of any unimportant crap, kehe."

Arriving at his podium, Hayasaka glanced either side at who he was situated beside, and then again at who they were adjacent to. He repeated this until he found himself staring directly ahead of him. Knowing where everyone was didn't aid him in anything, but it managed to slightly ease his growing nerves. As long as he could see everyone, and everyone could see him, there was a low chance this would be an easy task.

Hayasaka: ("To think, we had only just woken up on this island a few days ago, managed to find salvation in escape, only for that to be ripped away from us all so soon.")

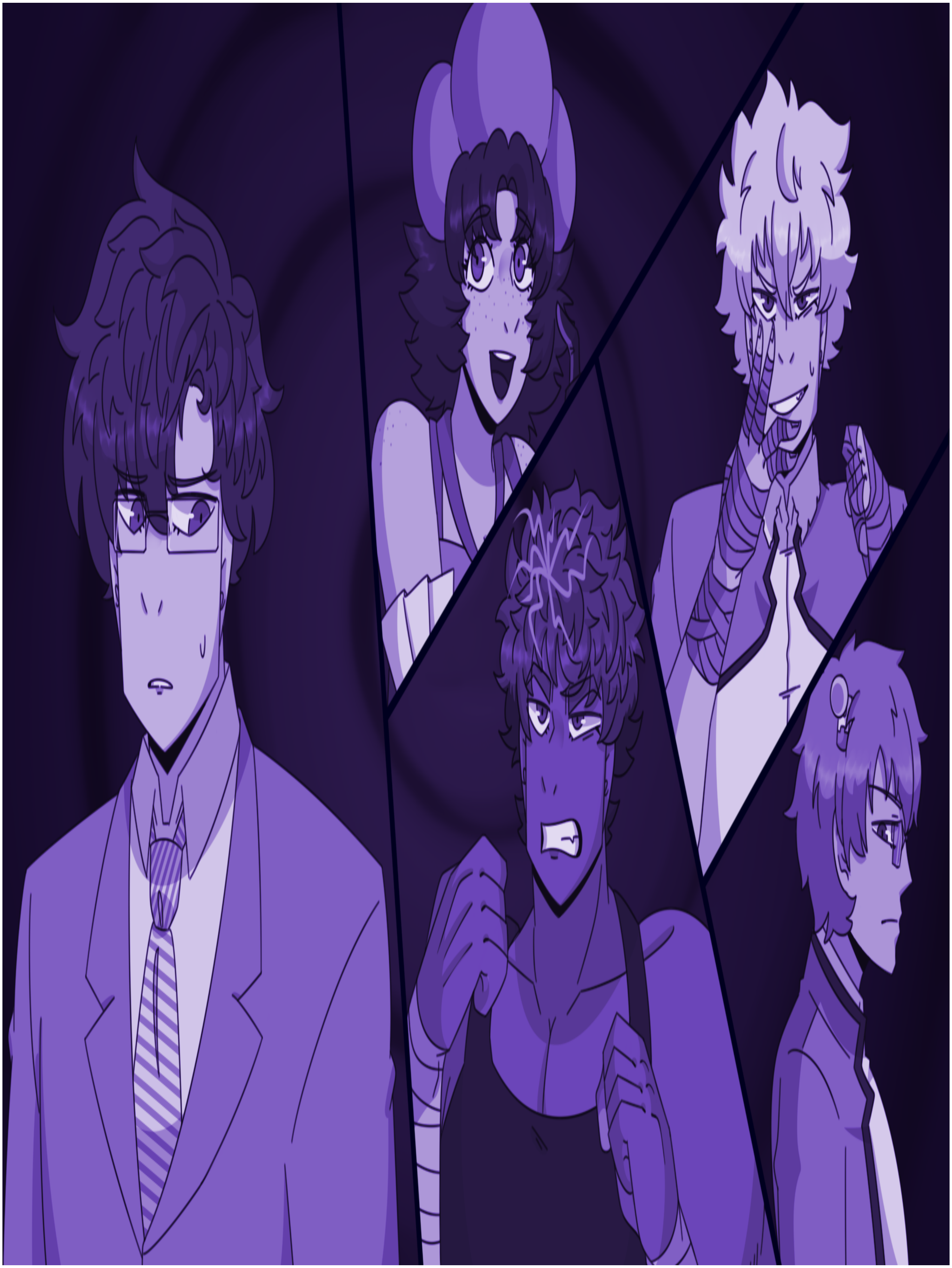


Hayasaka: (“Walter White… I-I didn’t know him for long at all, but how he made himself a prevalent leader amongst the group proves he’s no ordinary man. His idea to build the boat genuinely brought me hope, if only for a little while. But it doesn’t matter now. He’s dead. A-And someone here…”)



Hayasaka: (“One of these people killed him. Haha, just saying it in my head makes me feel crazy… Who would kill him? Why would they kill him?”)

Hayasaka: (“That isn’t something I can answer yet. But I’m nervous. Absolutely terrified, even. I don’t want to do this. I’m avenging a man I hardly even knew.”)



Hayasaka: ("But what choice do I have? Whether I like it or not, there's a criminal here, and we need to find out who that is. It's us against them. If not, where does our fate lie…?")

A heavy exhale escaped Hayasaka as he fully came to terms with what was going on.

The first executive trial had begun.

Chapter End Notes

HOLY SHIZ WE GOT AN ELEVATOR CG I REPEAT WE GOT AN ELEVATOR CG

I'm goin' all out for this one baybee

Anyway, now that you all have actual evidence to go off of this time, instead of just the daily life and BDA video, I wonder what predictions will be made? Unlike DR69, I have a feeling there's gonna be a pretty hefty amount this time around for ch1 alone, so all I ask is that you don't get too worked up over this! It's all in good fun, but it's cool to see what you guys think as well!

So, who kilt Walt of White? Theories welcome!

(While I can't exactly specify when the trial will come out, I'd give it 2-3 weeks!)

Chapter 1: Blue Sky Sinking (Executive Trial)

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! This chapter took a super long time to make so I apologise for the wait. However, as a lot of reoccurring things had to have been created (such as the scrum debate sprites and what-not) for the first time, I'm sure the next trials won't take as long! (...I hope haha)

Again, this chapter is quite long so make sure you have time set aside for this (this'll probably be the last warning on long chapters so keep that in mind).

Also, here are some things to look out for to help you read the trial properly:

The mass panic debate is read like this: character A, B and C's lines will be stacked. Read character A's line, then move onto the next stack and read the top line like you did for character A. Once the conversation has ended, start from the top but read character B's line and all the proceeding middle lines from the stacks. Rinse and repeat.

The closing argument comic is read right to left like how it is in Danganronpa.

And just to make sure, PLEASE keep your eyes peeled for underlined phrases, as they lead to links for videos! We spend quite a long time on them so for them to be unseen is always a bit of a pain (I know the majority of you already know about 'em but just for the ones who haven't caught on yet really).

I hope you have a good read! Let's get this trial underway!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite his commendable leadership role he decided to uptake in spite of the group's disarray, Walter was found dead this morning beside the very means of escape he planned everyone to leave on burnt to a crisp. Who would sabotage the boat, their only way home? Why did Walter die? And… how will Hayasaka and the others face the bloodied culprit?

TRUTH BULLETS

NESOS FILE 1

The victim is Walter White. The time of death is 11:45.P.M. approx. The body was discovered on Island Nesos' Beach. The victim's left arm is burnt in multiple areas, and has additionally suffered a large cut on the back of the neck alongside major bruising.

GLASS SHARD IN NECK

A large shard of glass was found lodged in the back of Walter's neck. It has a similar blue-green tint as the rest of the glass found on the beach.

BRUISES ON NECK

There is bruising that circles around Walter's neck, par behind the ears. While no other marks were found, it is clear that he had experienced some sort of neck trauma.

BLOOD ON WALTER'S MOUTH

A spot of blood was found trickling out of Walter's mouth. This would only be possible from an internal injury, and not any external wounds.

LEFT ARM BURN MARKS

A few spots on Walter's jacket sleeve had been burnt through, leaving dark burns on his skin. The marks are on a large concentrated area of Walter's arm.

HAMMER IN RIGHT HAND

A hammer was found in Walter's grip. The tool is clean, and has no sawdust on it.

BURNT BOAT AND WOOD PILE

Despite how the boat appeared almost completely finished the evening before, this morning it was found badly burnt. People working on the boat's production claimed that everything went smoothly and no one appeared to hold intentions to sabotage the boat.

A few metres away from the boat is a pile of unused wood. It is also burnt, but it's unclear as to why.

OPEN ALUMINIUM TOOL CASE

Every night after all the tools were cleared away, Walter had locked them up in an aluminium case. This morning, however, the case was found wide open. It is unclear who opened the case as the key was always kept on Walter's person.

Originally, it was believed no tools had been taken out of the case, but the hammer in Walter's hand has proved otherwise.

SMALL GLASS SHARDS

Small glass shards had been found scattered around the sand.

BAG OF GLASS SHARDS

A plastic bag full of large glass shards was found in the ocean close to the shore. The shards were identified to be the same blue-green tint as the smaller ones found in the sand.

BURNT PIECE OF PAPER

A burnt piece of paper was found on the boat with a message. The only parts that can be identified are 'meet me at the beach by the boat' and 'or else I'll expose your'. It is not clear who wrote the message or who it was directed towards.

KAIDOU'S ACCOUNT

Kaidou and his team, Latte, Hiroshi and Ena, were training in the sports centre from 10P.M. to 12A.M. During this time, Moony and Ena got into a fight, causing Ena to break out into an extreme fit of sadness. The rest of the team were forced to take care of the fight for the rest of their session. Kaidou claims that no one left during this time.

LATTE'S ACCOUNT

Around 11:30P.M, Latte could smell faint smoke while in the sports centre, but had originally dismissed it due to her attention being focused on Ena's breakdown. Latte was the only person to identify the smoke due to her need to keep her guard up around fire and heat.

BOJACK'S ACCOUNT

Ever since he arrived on the beach after the body discovery in the morning, Bojack could smell a faint alcohol scent around. He had identified it to be a type of rum.

JESSE'S ACCOUNT

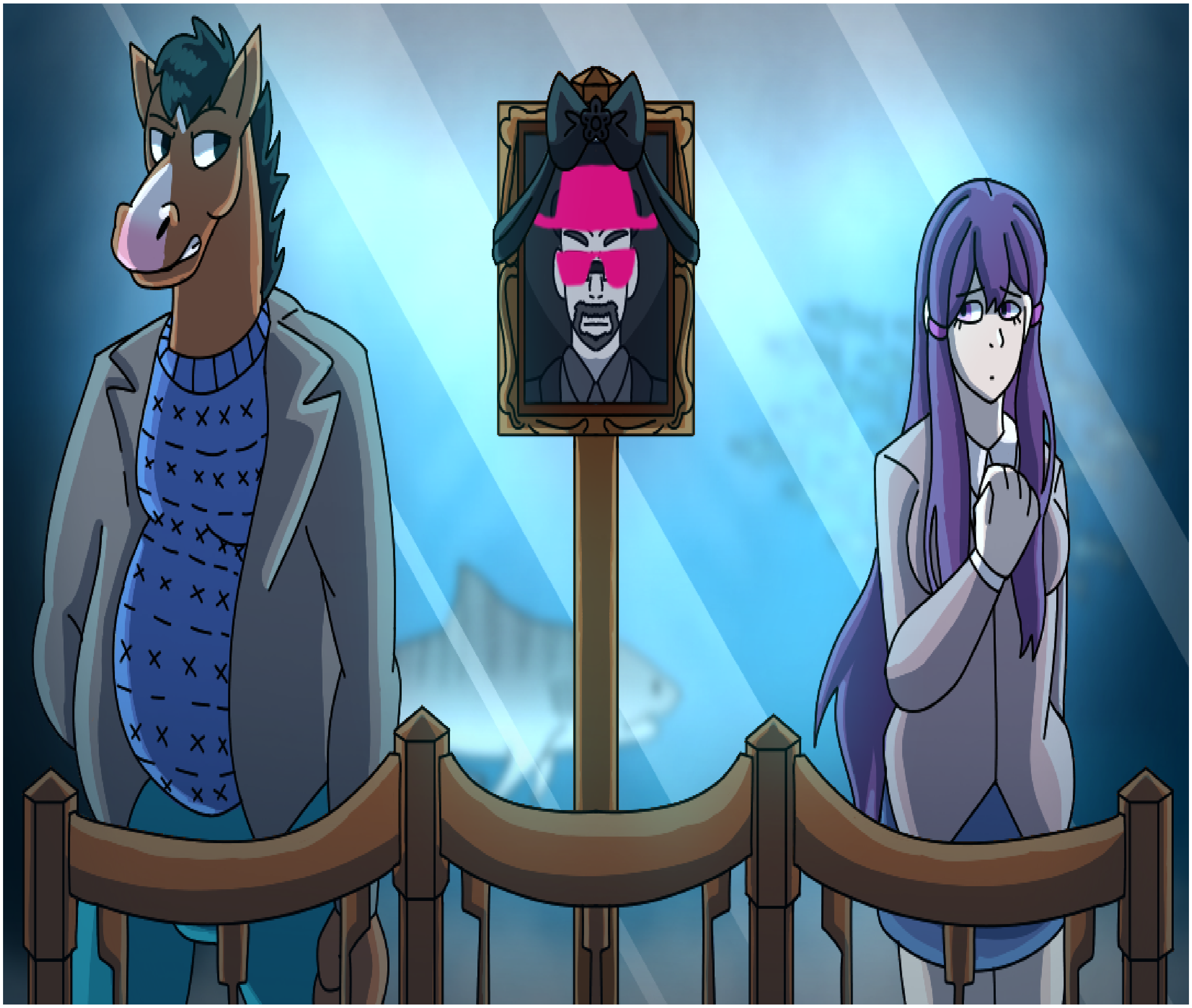
Jesse claimed to be with Walter yesterday only up until when Walter had called off the boat production early. Afterwards, Jesse had not seen Walter until discovering his body this morning. It is also worth noting that Hayasaka had seen Jesse during this window of time trying to search around the island for his lighter, which he claimed to have woken up with in the beginning.

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: ALL RISE!

Monotora: “Kehehe, welcome, prey, to the underwater executive trial! As a formal way of making sure the slow ones are sure of what you’re all gonna be gettin’ up to, allow me to present the rules of the trial. During the trial, you’ll present your arguments for who the culprit is, and eventually vote for the blackened. If you vote correctly, you’ll continue to live your mutual lives on the island as the blackened receives punishment. But, if you pick the wrong person… the blackened will be allowed to leave the island – perhaps in Nesos’ private plane? Kehe… As for the rest of you, you’ll receive the punishment instead. Got it? Good! Any questions?”

Hayasaka: (“This is it, huh? The first trial… Oh god, I already feel a little light-headed. That can’t be good…”)

Mai: “Ah, yes… What is that portrait over there? The one of Walter.”



Monotora: “I see you’ve all taken a gander at the elephant in the room. It’s mandatory that all deceased participants’ trial seats be replaced with a respectful frame of them. It’s almost as if the old guy’s here with us, eh?”

Latte: “It doesn’t feel all that respectful…”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “Uh, why don’t I just… There you go. Covered it with my hand. Now you can’t see Walter anymore. Does that make anything better?”

Retsuko: “Surely your hand would get tired after a while of keeping it up like that, right?”

Bojack: “...Shit. Well, nevermind then. Sorry about that. I tried, I guess.”

Jesse: “No, it–it’s fine. We gotta focus on the trial, anyway….”

Natsuki: “Focus on what, exactly? If being given no direction on how to investigate wasn’t enough, now we have to do this trial with equally no direction given!”

Hiroshi: “That only means we will have to path our own direction of discussion.”

Kaidou: “Where should we start then?”

L: “Well, there’s many subjects we need to discuss: the time frame, location choice, murder weapon, cause of death, witness accounts…”

Kaidou: “W-Wha… That’s too many things!”

Bojack: “Uh, don’t we already know the time and location? The file said 11:45P.M. – and yes I did read the file thank you very much – and we saw Walter lying dead on the beach for crying out loud.”

L: “Yes, I am very much aware everyone knows that, however what I’m trying to get at is the reason for said location and if there’s any key time events we need to figure out.”

Jesse: “Do we even need to go over every little damn detail of the case anyway? I thought all we needed was to get the killer’s name.”

L: “While our end goal is to identify the culprit, having details helps to whittle down the amount of possible suspects, and going off shaky claims won’t help us progress at all.”

Kurumada: “Alright, well, we know the time of death was fifteen minutes before nighttime. That’s gotta mean the killer struck before Monotora got the chance to interfere.”

Mai: “Oh, and because of Walter’s nighttime rule, if we were all in the hotel at the time, there would be no one around to witness the murder. How clever!”

Saiki: “ *Are you commending the killer…?* ”

Natsuki: “Well what I want to know is what Walter was even doing at the beach in the first place. Last night, he specifically told us all that we could finish early, so doesn’t that mean he realistically should’ve been at the hotel too?”

Yuri: “I-I found that strange as well…”

Hiroshi: “Perhaps there is an ulterior motive to be uncovered…”

Jesse: “There ain’t. I was never told anything different from Mr. White other than our original plan. If he was planning to do somethin’ to the boat, he would’ve told me.”

Retsuko: “But how do we know that’s true?”

Ena: “Wah! We’re going around in circles! Three-sixty upside down! Around and around the merry-go-round! Now I’m dizzy…”

L: “I can see we’re going nowhere without some sort of structure to this trial. In that case, I propose an open discussion: I assume you all have your own idea you wish to put forth, so we should take it in turns to speak our opinion. Then, if anyone has any objections to what’s been said, they can simply voice them afterwards. I believe this should push the trial forward.”

Monotora: “Oh, oh! How exciting! Who knew the Ultimate Criminal Investigator would take such initiative? Kehehe…”

Hayasaka: (“What L’s proposed… It sounds a little absurd, doesn’t it? I mean, what sort of trial works like that? Ah, but I suppose this is an atypical trial where fifteen people are trying to hold a discussion, haha… I-In any case, with the evidence I’ve collected, I should be able to catch out anything that sounds off so we stay on track. The last thing I want is all-out anarchy when all our lives our on the line…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

L: “I’ll begin by reiterating the question… Why was Walter at the beach?”

Latte: “It might have something to do with the boat. It was Walter’s idea in the first place, wasn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Naw, Walter had no reason to go out so damn late just an hour before nighttime kicked in – especially alone!”

Kaidou: “So if Walter didn’t go there willingly, then… *Gasp* ! He must’ve been forced there by some otherworldly power!”

Jesse: “Mr. White’s too stubborn to be dragged somewhere without good reason, y’know.”

Kaidou: “Then… Oh my god! It really was! It was Dark Reunion’s doing all along! I knew they were behind this death game!!”

Natsuki: “...Are you serious?”

Bojack: “Make-believe aside, Walter literally could’ve just been out for a stroll. I feel like you’re all making it out to be more complicated than it actually is.”

Mai: “Do you mean his appearance at the beach was **merely a coincidence**? I suppose his role as leader had stressed him out to the point where a good walk would be able to clear his head for the following day!”

Hayasaka: (“...This is what I have to work with. Hoo boy, there’s definitely something wrong here…”)

BURNT PIECE OF PAPER

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Ah, u-um, actually… Walter probably wasn’t at the beach by coincidence, nor did he go there willingly…”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka?”

Kaidou: “Aha! So, you do agree with me, Mr. Hayasaka! Dark Reunion *is* behind the death game, and they killed Walter!”

Hayasaka: “Um, n-no…? I believe Walter had a purpose to fulfil.”

Natsuki: “Eh? What does that mean?”

Hayasaka: “Brian, could you retrieve that message you found on the boat earlier? I think it may be important now.”

Brian: “Oh? A-Ah! On it! …Okay, here it is–”

Jesse: “Gimme that!”

Brian: “H-Hey–!”

Jesse: “The hell’s this…? ‘Meet me at the beach by the boat’... ‘or else I’ll expose your’... *Huh* ?”

Bojack: “Did you lose your ability to read or something?”

Jesse: “No, man! That’s all I can make out! The rest’s burnt as hell.”

Mai: “Oh dear! It appears that letter was addressed to Walter, hm? Does that mean he was blackmailed by the killer to come to the boat?”

L: “That’s what it appears to be…”

Kurumada: “So Walter was sent a letter threatenin’ to expose him for somethin’ we don’t know about, and so he had no choice but to go to the beach. I see what you were gettin’ at now, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well, h-haha…”

Retsuko: “Huh? But what did Walter have to hide?”

Latte: “And how will we figure out what it is with no evidence?”

Ena: “Surely it is not entirely unknown! Walter had a companion who he shared all his secrets with, likewise with me and Moony!”

Hayasaka: “Um, are you referring to Jesse…?”

Jesse: “There ain’t no dirt to blackmail Mr. White with – it doesn’t matter! The only thing that does is finding the killer. This shit’s just putting us off what we gotta figure out. Mr. White died at 11:45, yeah? So, all we gotta do is whittle down the alibis.”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse seems awfully pushy in finding the killer. Although, I understand where he’s coming from: so much filler when you just want to know who killed your friend must be rather annoying… But, I need to keep my focus. S-Somehow, I didn’t exactly screw up last time, so perhaps I have a chance to try again…”)

NONSTOP DEBATE

Natsuki: “What do you mean by alibis exactly? I thought it was agreed before we were all at the hotel.”

Jesse: “Okay, yeah, but like, if this message was written to Mr. White, then it can’t be anyone workin’ on the boat during the day, y’know, with Mr. White present.”

Hiroshi: “What if someone had slipped away to write the message in private?”

Jesse: “We saw no one leave, so it’s not like anyone had jogged off to go slip it under his door or whatever.”

Yuri: “M-Maybe he was given the note in the morning…?”

Jesse: “If he had been given it in the morning, then surely he would’ve told me. He’s always out his door at seven sharp, so I would’ve seen it in his hand when he knocked on my door.”

Kurumada: “Alright, we get it already! Boat team’s safe, according to ya.”

Bojack: “So who was on the boat team again?”

Mai: “Me, Natsuki, Yuri, Saiki, Retsuko, Brian, L, Jesse, Walter, and you!”

Bojack: “Oh yeah, I was, wasn’t I? Wait, does that mean I’m off the suspect list? Already?”

Yuri: “What about the ‘distraction team’...?”

Kaidou: “Wait… us?! I swear, none of my team would ever betray me and be so ruthless as to kill! I trained them all very well!”

Saiki: “ *Did you train them like dogs or something* ?”

Jesse: “Give the gag up already! **One of you guys had all the time in the damn world** to kill Mr. White! Just fess up, for fuck’s sake!”

Hayasaka: (“H-Hang on… There’s definitely something I know that proves that isn’t entirely correct…”)

KAIDOU’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Not *all* of them were free during the time of the murder, however. In fact, Kaidou and his, um, ‘team’, were training in the sports centre when Walter died.”

Kaidou: “That’s right! Perhaps I should’ve invited you to join my warriors this whole time with such loyalty, Mr. Hayasaka!”

Hayasaka: “Um, i-it’s fine, really…”

Natsuki: “And how long was this ‘training’ for?”

Hiroshi: “From 10P.M.-12A.M. And since the murder took place at 11:45P.M., well, it’s obvious it cannot be any of us.”

Retsuko: “Even if you could write Walter a letter without anyone seeing you, I guess that does mean you couldn’t even go to the beach in the first place.”

Latte: “Oh, well isn’t that a relief?”

Ena: “But who does that leave us with? Does that mean no one was available to kill Walter? Oh dear! He must have died on his own without permission!”

Brian: “A-Actually, doesn’t that only leave Hayasaka and Kurumada…?”

Kurumada: “Huh…?”

L: “That is correct. As they were their own separate entity from the boat production or distraction group, they would hardly have any witness accounts to prove where they were during the day or night.”

Hayasaka: (“O-Oh dear. In helping those four, I’ve apparently shot myself and Kurumada in the foot. Ah, for heaven’s sake!”)

Jesse: “We’ve gotten it down to two, right? We just gotta choose which one did it then, right?”

Latte: “Should it really be this easy, though?”

Bojack: “It seems real easy to me. There’s not even a competition here.”

Kurumada: “Excuse me?”

Natsuki: “No offence, but out of you two, there’s only one I’d pick.”

Hiroshi: “The dilemma between a boxer and an office worker. Only one is a lot stronger, and therefore easily able to kill.”

Retsuko: “Wait – so Kurumada is the killer?”

Mai: “Don’t be silly! There’s no way it’s Kurumada! What would he gain from killing Walter?”

L: “And what exact conviction apart from strength makes you all believe it was Kurumada?”

Yuri: “H-He could’ve used his strength against Walter… Ah, I don’t think many of us would stand a chance against him…”

Kaidou: “Do you mean he beat Walter up like a delinquent?!”

Kurumada: “If that even mattered in the first place, then you all would’a suspected me in the fuckin’ beginning!”

Hayasaka: “T-That’s not possible… If Kurumada had physically beaten Walter, we would’ve found evidence of bruises on his body. However, I checked over his body, and there weren’t any – apart from the one on his neck, of course.”

Mai: “See? Hayasaka’s a doctor, so you can trust him!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not a doctor, Mai… It’s just medical records and machinery…”

Bojack: “Yeah, well, obviously the only boxer on the island isn’t going to give himself away like that.”

Ena: “A case of misdirection… So much smoke and mirrors! I cannot see through the fog!”

Jesse: “You said–you said there’s still the bruise on Mr. White’s neck, though… Don’t wounds like that indicate stranglin’ n’ shit?”

Hayasaka: “What? W-Well, usually, but–”

Natsuki: “So he *strangled* him to death?”

Retsuko: “I couldn’t have imagined such a brutal end like that…”

Bojack: “So is that it? Do we vote now?”

Brian: “T-That quick?”

Kurumada: “I knew I couldn’t trust any of ya – you’re all just ganging up against the first guy you find suspicious!”

Hayasaka: “Calm down…!”

L: “Hayasaka, there’s no need for panic. You’ve already confirmed during the investigation that this line of reasoning is impossible.”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah…?”

Mai: “Please tell them, Hayasaka!”

Hayasaka: (“I need to save Kurumada. T-This is just ridiculous, but… *Oh* . I think I know what L’s referring to…”)

BRUISES ON NECK

Hayasaka: “O-Okay, yes, while there is bruising on Walter’s neck, to say it was done by hand is unlikely.”

Hiroshi: “And how so?”

Hayasaka: “The bruise itself is only on the neck, not behind the ears. As well as that, the bruise is relatively clean, as in, no nail marks. Walter appears to have been strangled, but it was definitely not done by hand.”

L: “It’s as if none of you have ever paid attention to an autopsy before…”

Saiki: “ *Why do you say that like we’re supposed to know…* ”

L: “That was a joke on my end. Anyway, what I’m trying to say is that Hayasaka is correct. I would have simply explained it myself, but it’s rather nice watching a friend save another, isn’t it?”

Monotora: “Man, you’re all kinds of weird!”

Natsuki: “Coming from *you* !”

Latte: “So if Walter wasn’t strangled physically, how did he die?”

Jesse: “...It ain’t easy gettin’ the jump on Mr. White. So if he wasn’t caught in a chokehold by some big guy, then sneakin’ up on him just won’t cut it.”

Kurumada: “‘Some big guy’... *tch* .”

Retsuko: “He did appear to be very aware of his surroundings. I don’t think even *I* could stealth my way past him – i-it’s kinda scary, actually…”

Yuri: “Is it not possible that the killer talked with Walter before attacking him? That way, they could’ve lured him into a false sense of security…”

Brian: “But wouldn’t he have just run away?”

Kaidou: “So then he was caught using some sort of capturing device! Dark Reunion surely has technology like that!”

Saiki: “ *Can Kaidou be allowed to sit out for the rest of this trial?”*

L: “We can agree the most likely choice was that Walter was taken off guard in order to be attacked. If we think about what Walter was doing there in the first place, being instructed by a threatening message, he would be rather suspicious of it all. Of course, this means that it cannot be anyone large, such as Kurumada, who would be easily spotted. On the other hand it disproves anyone small who cannot reach his neck as that’s where most of his injuries had occurred.”

Latte: “Goodness. You have quite the wit about you! You sound just like one of my colleagues.”

Mai: “And with that, Kurumada is saved!”

Kurumada: “I wouldn’t go around celebratin’ just yet…”

Yuri: “S-So who are we left with…?”

Jesse: “*... Hayasaka* .”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?”

Hiroshi: “Accounting for the alibis presented so far, alongside Kurumada not being a possible candidate anymore, the only possible culprit is him.”

Brian: “I-It can’t be Hayasaka! He seems too kind!”

Saiki: “ *Is kindness even a reliable factor in a death game?* ”

Kurumada: “Damnit, why do ya all get off on convictin’ us?! First off, your alibi nonsense is bullshit. If Hayasaka was the killer, then why’d he go and decide to watch over me instead of work on the boat? That would’ve given him a perfect alibi then.”

Natsuki: “It’s still a little suspicious, though…”

L: “...There must be another way to have lowered Walter’s guard that doesn’t involve sneaking up on him immediately.”

Retsuko: “There is?”

Bojack: “It’s probably the boat. I mean, if you saw your greatest achievement set on fire right in front of you, of course you’re going to be distracted.”

Jesse: “The boat wasn’t Mr. White’s ‘greatest achievement’! You know nothin’ about him!”

Mai: “But how was the boat set on fire in the first place without Walter noticing them?”

Ena: “Come now, everyone! Let us hold another game of talk!”

Hayasaka: (“I’m unsure if what L’s doing is in an attempt to push the case along or to prove my innocence… Whatever it is, I need to keep my guard up.”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Hiroshi: “For the killer to set alight to the boat without Walter noticing seems like quite the impossible feat.”

Natsuki: “I mean, he was invited to the boat. He would’ve seen the killer at the boat then, wouldn’t he?”

Kaidou: “What if… Ah! The killer caused another distraction so they could set the boat on fire!”

Yuri: “A distraction on top of a distraction…?”

Kurumada: “That seems like some damn mind games.”

Brian: “Um… did the killer **necessarily light the *boat* on fire**?”

Jesse: “Um, hello? The boat was the only thing we found burnt to a crisp, dumbass!”

Brian: “I-I’m sorry!”

L: “...This really does shed light on the more competent ones, doesn’t it?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I see where he’s coming from. Since I knew he was suspicious of this particular thing from the start, it makes sense why he’d bring it up…”)

BURNT BOAT AND WOOD PILE

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I agree with Brian. The boat wasn’t the only thing at the scene that was burnt. A few metres off, there was an unused pile of wood.”

Brian: “L-Like Hayasaka said! It was burnt too, which is kinda strange, right?”

Hiroshi: “So what you’re concluding is that setting light to said pile would be an easier task than the boat?”

Hayasaka: “It’s a lot smaller, and would be much less in Walter’s immediate attention at the time.”

Kurumada: “He’s got a point. The killer prolly needed just any old fire to cause a commotion – Walter sure as hell wouldn’t be expectin’ any fires in the first place.”

Jesse: “...Guess you’re right.”

Bojack: “It’s sound, but what irks me is how exactly the wood was set on fire. You didn’t happen to see any jugs of lighter fuel at the supermarket now, did you?”

Ena: “I do not remember seeing any products by the name ‘lighter fuel’. Oh, is it a refreshment?”

Retsuko: “I think he was just joking… B-But don’t try to drink it!”

Latte: “But he’s right. I was actually very confused when I first saw the burnt boat. I didn’t think we had access to the proper equipment to create fires.”

L: “Well, in order for the culprit not to be spotted by Walter, there’s only one explanation for the method on how the wood was lit.”

Kaidou: “A fire-type summoning incantation!”

Saiki: “ *He’s pushing it, again* …”

Hayasaka: “Do you mean something had to have been thrown onto the wood to spark a fire…?”

Mai: “Oh, Hayasaka! How smart!”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s the only thing I can think of, really…”

Yuri: “Um, wouldn’t whatever was thrown be broken by the impact, though?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, Yuri’s right. Was there any evidence of broken stuff on the beach?”

Hayasaka: (“Actually, there is, isn’t there…?”)

SMALL GLASS SHARDS

Hayasaka: “Scattered around the sand were small shards of glass. They weren’t there until recently this morning, so they’re probably connected to the case.”

Jesse: “Is just some tiny ass glass enough to say it’s connected?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, ‘cuz it ain’t the only glass we found. Show ‘em, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: (“Show? But we didn’t collect the… *sigh* , I can only hope he meant metaphorically…”)

BAG OF GLASS SHARDS

Hayasaka: “Kurumada and I found that a plastic bag of larger glass shards was attempted to be discarded in the ocean. Both glass have the same green-blue tint, and so must be important to what happened.”

Kaidou: “Aha! I knew looking in the sand was a genius idea on my part!”

Saiki: “ *It’s only because you stepped on it and caused a big scene…* ”

Hiroshi: “As far as I’m aware, the only glass objects we’ve discovered on the island thus far have been bottles…”

Ena: “Do not forget the windows!”

Jesse: “Take this seriously, goddammit!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! I’m sorry to interrupt – well I’m actually not but – I’m just so invested in this little play time of yours! Keep it comin’!”

Natsuki: “But that makes even less sense. Why was a bottle thrown to cause a fire?”

L: “Perhaps it is due to the contents of the bottle that we’ll find our answer.”

Retsuko: “Should we go back to the beach and try to piece the bottle back together to see if we can make out the label?”

L: “No, I don’t think we need to waste our time with something trivial when someone here’s already told us what it is.”

Mai: “They have? Oh, I see. It’s your keen detective skills again!”

Bojack: “Well, don’t keep us in the dark. Tell us who it is.”

Hayasaka: (“...Slightly ironic, isn’t it?”)

BOJACK’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “Bojack… it was you.”

Bojack: “Wait–shit, what? Me?”

Kurumada: “You’re the one who said he could smell alcohol around the beach, dumbass.”

Bojack: “Oh yeah. Speaking of alcohol… *sip* , yeah, that’s the stuff.”

Natsuki: “Eh? How come you have a flask with you? Is that even allowed?”

Bojack: “Uh, there’s no rules against not being allowed to bring stuff into here, right? And anyway, I was thirsty. Oh, are you asking how I have this with me? Well, I happened to find it in the kitchen. I see no harm in keeping it with me.”

Retsuko: “Drinking on the job is a little irresponsible…”

Bojack: “Hey, it’s not like I was gonna offer it to anyone. I’m between a dead guy and a minor.”

Saiki: “ *Good grief* …”

Hayasaka: “...A-Anyway, from this lingering smell of alcohol, it’s most likely the bottle was an alcoholic drink.”

Kurumada: “Also makes sense why only the alcoholic could smell it. Most of the scent had prolly worn off by the mornin’ since the murder was at least a good few hours ago.”

Bojack: “Let’s see when those steroids backfire on you.”

Kurumada: “What the fuck did you just say?!”

Yuri: “N-No conflict, please!”

L: “I’m surprised we’ve made it this far already. Regardless, we’re on the right track here. Alcohol can be quite the flammable substance – perfect for lighting something on fire, wouldn’t you agree?.”

Hiroshi: “And yet, can’t quite a lot of common alcohols be put out rather easily? Most won’t stay lit for long.”

Mai: “But not all! We have to figure out which it was!”

Retsuko: “Um, Bojack, you were always looking for alcohol, weren’t you? Is there any chance you can identify the types you found on the island?”

Bojack: “Sure. Uh, god, let’s see here… You had your typical beer, wine – both red and white – whiskey, scotch, bourbon – yet to try that here – even bacardi, tequila, vodka… Shit, do I look like a drunk to you all? I swear I’m not. I’m just… uh, *refined* .”

Latte: “Oh my, I’ve hardly heard of half of these myself…”

Kaidou: “So which one’s are flammable?”

L: “Hm… Bacardi… Quite a highly flammable substance… Was it 151?”

Bojack: “I think so? I mean, I don’t read labels per say, I just see the colour and shape of the bottle.”

Natsuki: “You’re ‘refined’, alright…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, and what did said bacardi bottle look like?”

Bojack: “Well, it’s big, like at least a litre, and it has this… blue-green colour?”

Kurumada: “Shit, just like the glass we found on the beach!”

L: “As well as that, I recall Bojack mentioned that the alcohol scent was specifically rum. As bacardi is a white rum, there’s no doubt that this was the alcohol used to light the wood on fire.”

Bojack: “Everyone better thank me for my help. You couldn’t have figured that out without me, you know?”

Brian: “Um, t-thank you…?”

Ena: “I see! This ‘barcode-dee’ was thrown at the lone pile of wood, causing a catastrophic fire that burned into Walter’s very eyes! Things have begun to heat up!”

Jesse: “Alright Einstein, but we don’t have a clue how the bottle was lit in the first place. Just throwin’ a bottle onto some wood ain’t gonna do jack.”

Mai: “Let’s discuss ideas, everyone!”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Latte: “Somehow, this bottle of bacardi was lit on fire, thrown at the wood, and caused a fire to distract Walter.”

Retsuko: “So how did the killer light the bottle?”

Yuri: “M-Maybe matches were used? I thought I saw some at the supermarket…”

Bojack: “It could’ve been a lighter. Who knows.”

Natsuki: “If a lighter was used, then it has to be someone who smokes!”

Kaidou: “Ah, smoking! The most heinous of delinquent crimes! I’d never be caught red-handed with such a thing!”

Saiki: “ *You’re not even allowed to smoke, Kaidou…* ”

Brian: “Can we identify anyone here as a smoker?”

Hiroshi: “It’s unlikely. As we haven’t been provided access to cigarettes, it’s uncertain who it could be.”

Kurumada: “On top of that, there’s no way in hell any smokers are gonna out themselves at this point – ya just gonna make yourself a prime suspect!”

Retsuko: “So **there’s no way to tell**? That’s going to be a problem…”

Hayasaka: (“...Ah, perhaps there is someone here with a rather odd skill that could aid us in this dilemma…”)

LATTE’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, there is one way. Latte, didn’t you say you had the ability to identify smoke from a large distance away?”

Jesse: “That’s the first I’m hearing of that.”

Mai: “It’s true! Latte is just so talented, aren’t you sweetie?”

Kurumada: “ *Sweetie* ?!”

Mai: “It’s just a pet name, Kurumada. I give it to all my friends!”

Hayasaka: ("You've never given something like that to us…")

Latte: "Ah, you are right. Around 11:30P.M. last night, I was able to detect a smoke scent while in the sports centre."

Brian: "So if you could smell smoke, does that mean it was the fire at the beach?"

L: "It was indeed the only thing to produce smoke at the time. Following a timeline of events, the boat's burning had to precede Walter's death at 11:45P.M. I'm surprised to say, but it appears Latte's skill is viable."

Kurumada: "The hell's that gotta do with our problem, though? We don't care about the boat right now!"

Hiroshi: "If Latte can detect smoke from quite the distance, it should be a cakewalk to pick up smoke lingering on said substance takers."

Hayasaka: "T-That's what I was trying to get at, haha…"

Natsuki: "So, who's a smoker?"

Latte: "I'll try… Hm… Ah, I can smell smoke coming from there, and… over there."

L: "Those are Jesse and Bojack's directions."

Jesse: "W-What?"

Bojack: "Goddamnit. Now I look twice as bad."

Kaidou: “We found our culprits! Give it up and confess, and I may not be so harsh on you when I unveil my powers of justice!”

Kurumada: “Hell, I mean the two both look the type to drink. They prolly know their way around alcohol n’ shit.”

Yuri: “With one of them admitting that they know a lot about alcohol…”

Bojack: “Okay, okay, hold the phone. You seriously can’t be suspecting me after this, can you? I just identified a shit ton of alcohol for you. I wouldn’t have even bothered if I was the killer.”

L: “I’m sure even someone like you would’ve kept your mouth shut about the alcohol smell on the beach as well.”

Hiroshi: “In that case, the only possible suspect falls onto one individual: Jesse.”

Jesse: “What? You can’t–you can’t be fuckin’ serious right now! *Me* ? I knew Mr. White! Why would I kill him?!”

Latte: “Didn’t we say the killer wrote a letter to Walter to invite him out to the beach? Would Jesse need to do that since Walter trusted him?”

Retsuko: “Also, why would Jesse need to sneak up on Walter? If anything, Walter wouldn’t become alarmed at the sight of his friend, right?”

Bojack: “Who says he didn’t do just that to hide his identity? We call that a plot twist in Hollywoo. Well, no, just shitty directors if anything.”

Jesse: “I thought you were on my side, asshole!”

Bojack: “There’s sides to this? I thought this was every man for himself.”

Mai: “For Jesse to create a note in the first place does allow him to appear less suspicious, as it leaves the culprit open to be anyone except for him.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, and since he’s a smoker, he’s gotta have a lighter with him. With that he could light the bottle on fire and throw it at the wood to distract Walter.”

Jesse: “You’re wrong! You’re all damn wrong! I couldn’t have done it in the first place – and you wanna know why? It’s ‘cuz my lighter went missin’ on the night of the murder! So you go have your lil’ ‘dicussion’ and fuckin’ explain that!”

Ena: “He has become as feisty as the fire!”

Kurumada: “What an awfully fuckin’ convient story for you.”

Retsuko: “T-That is kinda suspicious, though…”

Hayasaka: (“It would be suspicious, if not for the fact that, well…”)

JESSE’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “Um, a-actually, what Jesse’s saying is right. Last night when I was walking to the park to meet up with Kurumada, I crossed paths with Jesse, who claimed he was looking for something. More specifically, his lighter.”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry for… Jesse?”

Jesse: “Damnit, where the hell did it go…?”

Hayasaka: “A-Are you looking for something?”

Jesse: “Yeah, just–just my lighter, alright? You seen it anywhere?”

Hayasaka: “Why would you have a lighter with you?”

Jesse: “Look, just–I always got a lighter on me, y’know? And, for some reason, I woke up with it here. But that doesn’t matter ‘cuz it’s missin’ for some reason.”

Hayasaka: “Well, I’m afraid I haven’t seen it around here… Where did you last see it?”

Jesse: “I dunno–shit! Am I supposed to keep track of shit like that? Anyway, if it ain’t here, then I’m gonna bounce. Fuck, man…”

FLASHBACK END

Yuri: “But… why didn’t you mention that earlier?”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?”

Kurumada: “Oh, c’mon! Like Hayasaka has anythin’ to hide here! D’ya really think he’s in cohorts with Jesse?”

Yuri: “I suppose you have a point. I-I’m so sorry for doubting you, Hayasaka!”

Natsuki: “Hey, don’t shout at her! She’s just trying to help!”

Latte: “Calm down, everyone. Jesse, can you tell us what happened to your lighter in more detail?”

Jesse: “...Well, alright. Like, I dunno when it happened, but when I checked my pocket around evenin’ time when Mr. White said we could pack up early, I noticed it was missin’. And so I went lookin’ for it.”

Bojack: “Why did you need it so badly? We don’t even have access to cigarettes.”

Jesse: “It’s just a comfort thing, yo! I’m just sayin’, what if we did get ‘em one day? We got given alcohol and shit, y’know? I dunno – just not havin’ it on me makes me antsy.”

Saiki: “ *You say that as if you were co-dependent on it…* ”

Jesse: “Whatever, man! Anyway, for some reason, I found it back in my pocket this mornin’ at the restaurant, and that’s all I know.”

Hiroshi: “So what you’re claiming is that between last night and this morning, your lighter was not on your person?”

Jesse: “I ain’t ‘claiming’ nothing! I’m tellin’ the damn truth!”

Mai: “Hm, perhaps someone stole your lighter when you weren’t looking?”

Kaidou: “Someone must’ve performed a dark deception on your reality, using swift agility to steal your lighter!”

Brian: “O-Or just swipe it when he wasn’t paying attention…”

L: “In essence, it was perhaps done to light the bottle on fire, *and* subsequently frame him as the culprit.”

Natsuki: “Wait – was if it was Hayasaka? I mean, he was the only one to witness Jesse searching for the lighter.”

Jesse: “No way, I was lookin’ way before I ran into him.”

Hayasaka: (“Always coming back to me, huh? Haha… How nerve-wracking.”)

Mai: “So, just to recap everything so far: a lighter, stolen from Jesse, was used to light a bottle of bacardi on fire. Then, the lit bottle was thrown onto the pile of wood beside the boat to cause a fire to distract Walter so the killer could attack him.”

Retsuko: “It really does seem like quite the complicated method, huh?”

Kurumada: “Shit like that’s normally pre-planned. Ain’t no last minute decision.”

Yuri: “...And the physical fire is what distracted Walter?”

Kaidou: “What do you mean?”

Yuri: “Could, um, could a fire alone distract Walter?”

Bojack: “I mean, it was my idea in the first place. Wait, you’re not calling me dumb are you?”

Yuri: “N-No! It’s just… If Walter was standing at the boat at the time, wouldn’t he have seen the bottle be thrown onto the wood?”

Brian: “But didn’t we say before that the wood pile wasn’t in Walter’s immediate attention?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, but I’m pretty sure anyone would suddenly notice a giant bottle being hurled across the beach close by.”

Hiroshi: “It’s not just that, but we must account for what would happen after the fire. We’ve theorised the killer attacked Walter after causing the fire, correct? However, with the added light, Walter had the ability to see someone approach him with malicious intent.”

Latte: “Oh, I didn’t really think about that part…”

Ena: “Alas! We were incorrect the whole time! Time has only slipped away from our careless mistakes! No, no, no! So useless!”

Retsuko: “But if we were wrong about this route the whole time, then where does that get us?”

Hayasaka: (“I-It would most likely go back to suspecting me, which is bad considering I’ve been helping out all this time…”)

Latte: “So what do we agree happened? I just don’t think there’s any other possibilities…”

Bojack: “Hey, I’m willing to back off. I mean, it was my idea, but it only incriminated me more than I expected.”

Kurumada: “We don’t have the time to ‘back off’! We gotta figure out the killer!”

L: “...How interesting. I believe there’s a slight rift between our ideas.”

Kaidou: “Like a… split?”

Monotora: “Hey, hey! You said it – you said the buzzword! Ahaha!”

Kaidou: “H-Huh? What buzzword? Oh no, am I gonna be faced with a secret challenge?!”

Monotora: “Hell no! When an executive trial is faced with a split opinion, where the majority of the coworkers believe one thing, and the rest believe the other, then I’ve been instructed to host what you may call a *scrum debate* .”

Kurumada: “A ‘scrum debate’? The hell’s that?”

Monotora: “You’ll just have to wait and see, kehe… Oh, isn’t the unknown so blood-rushing?”

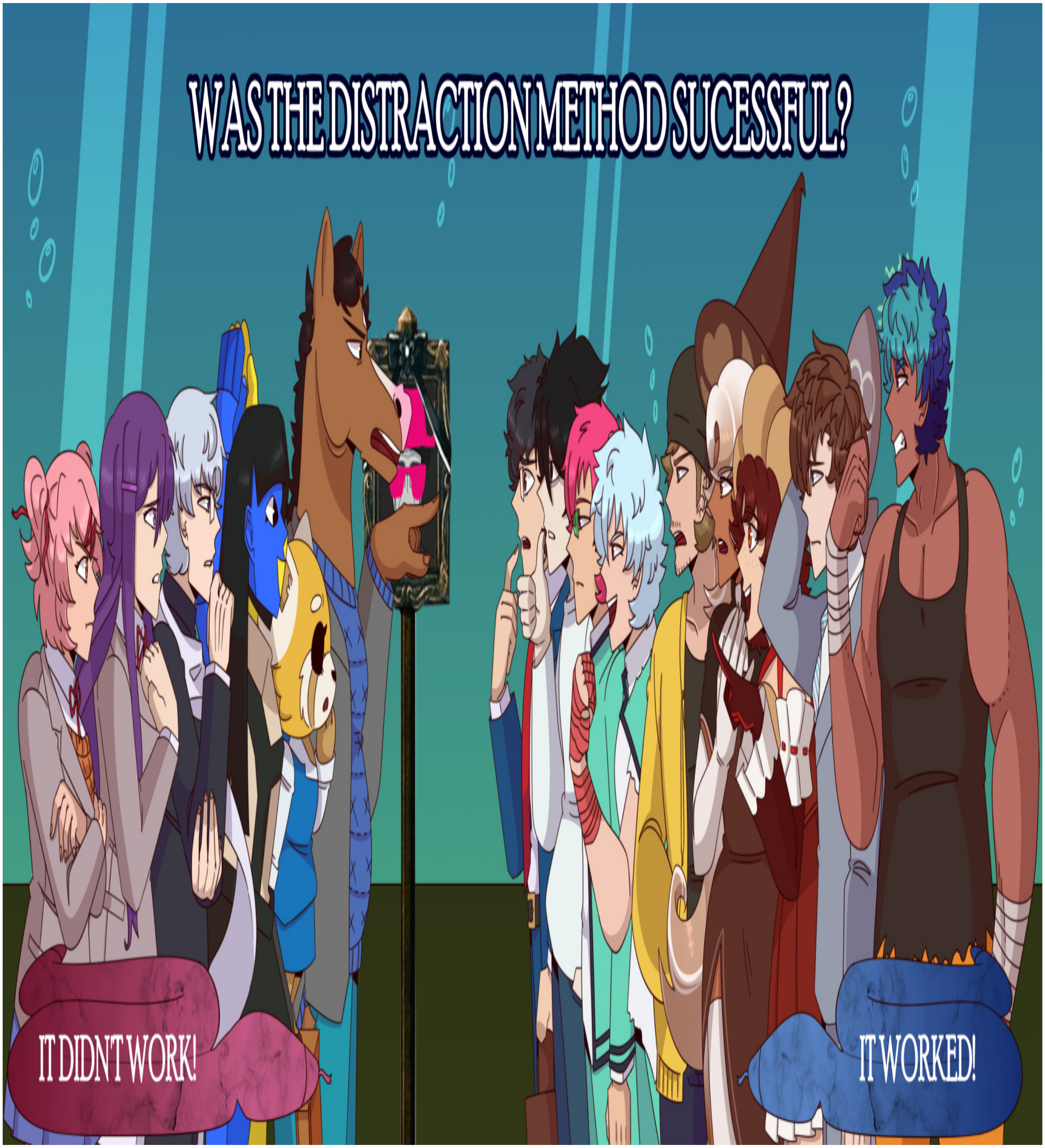
Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Just from the description alone, it’s just going to be another debate, right? Ah, well, I need to do what I can to convince the others. B-But, I’m not sure how to be trustworthy when all I have is the pre-existing facts… If we keep going, will something new eventually show itself? That’s all I can hope for…”)

SPLIT OPINION

-WAS THE DISTRACTION METHOD SUCCESSFUL?-

DEBATE SCRUM START


WAS THE DISTRACTION METHOD SUCESSFUL?
IT DIDN'T WORK!
IT WORKED!

Natsuki: “It’s just like Yuri said – wouldn’t Walter have **run away** if he saw the bottle being thrown?”

Kurumada: “Why would he **run away** when the boat could’ve been in danger from the fire?”

Retsuko: “Are we sure this **bacardi** was flammable enough to set the wood on fire? We don’t actually know if it was that brand of alcohol.”

Mai: “A lot of people here have confirmed that **bacardi** is flammable enough to cause a fire with ease!”

Hiroshi: “How do you propose the killer attacked Walter when he could see them with the fire’s **light**?”

L: “Even if he did witness the attacker with the **light**, we’re yet to discuss the method of attack.”

Bojack: “How do we know Jesse isn’t **lying** about his lighter being stolen?”

Hayasaka: “He’s not **lying** because I saw him looking for it before the time of the murder.”

Ena: “Are we certain there are no extra **methods** that we have fallen aloof for?”

Kaidou: “This **method** must be the correct one with so much evidence to back it up!”

Yuri: “Was the physical **sight** of the fire enough to stun Walter, however…?”

Jesse: “No – because what stunned Mr. White wasn’t the **sight**, it was the smoke!”

CROUCH BIND

IT WORKED

“This is our answer!”

FULL
COUNTER

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Huh? Jesse, w-what’re you talking about?”

Jesse: “Looks, there’s… there’s one more way Mr. White could’ve gotten distracted by the fire, alright? In fact, it’ll render him completely useless.”

Natsuki: “Really? What is it?”

Jesse: “You all didn’t know this – and it makes sense ‘cuz he had no reason to tell you all – but Mr. White had cancer.”

Kurumada: “Cancer?!”

Latte: “Oh dear, I had no idea!”

Jesse: “Lung cancer, if you wanna get specific. And he had–well he had this cough, yeah? This lung infection, he told me. Y’know, like when he’d get overwhelmed with, uh, substances or stress, his cough’ll start up.”

Bojack: “Jesus, Jesse…”

L: “It makes sense now. Yes, it really does. How Walter would always clear his throat before speaking, and how he had quite the nasty coughing fit once he raised his voice at us the previous morning. Of course, I had suspected he had a medical condition at his age, and it appears lung cancer does fit the bill.”

Hayasaka: “...So, when you mentioned the smoke, you’re suggesting the intake of such a substance had caused Walter’s cough to flare up?”

Jesse: “He’d uh… be pretty much open to any attacks then, y’know, all bent over, hackin’ and shit.”

Retsuko: “I don’t mean to be rude, but is there any evidence this happened?”

Kurumada: “...Ain’t there, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“Yes, there is…”)

BLOOD ON WALTER’S MOUTH

Hayasaka: “We found blood on Walter’s mouth. Since that can only occur from internal bleeding, it’s too much of a coincidence to say this couldn’t be from the lung infection…”

Jesse: “And Mr. White has definitely coughed up blood durin’ these fits – I’ve seen it happen before.”

Brian: “T-That’s…”

Yuri: “Oh my goodness, I… I-I’m so sorry for doubting you. I had no idea–a-and now I feel horrible…!”

Jesse: “Like I said, it’s fine. You didn’t know. How could you know…?”

Ena: “How could anyone know?”

Kaidou: “Wait, how *did* anyone know?”

Latte: “Huh?”

Mai: “Oh, that is right. If only Jesse knew about Walter’s cough, then how come it was used against Walter by the killer?”

Hiroshi: “The only possible way for this theory to be correct, is if the culprit knew of Walter’s condition beforehand in order to set up the distraction method.”

Saiki: “ *And the only person to claim such a thing is …*”

Jesse: “Are you serious? Anyone could’ve found out, for fuck’s sake! And my lighter was stolen anyway, so I couldn’t have done it even if I really wanted to!”

L: “Let’s not get too hung up on the culprit’s identity for now. There’s still the second half of this case we need to figure out. I propose we move onto how exactly the culprit attacked Walter when he was stunned.”

Brian: “I-I saw there was a glass shard lodged in Walter’s neck… Maybe that was how the killer intended to attack him?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I don’t think so. Knowing of the bruising on his neck – most likely strangulation marks – it’s likely that had to have come first.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, with the glass in the way, it’d be damn impossible to strangle him!”

Natsuki: “Who even attacks someone with glass, anyway?”

Brian: “I don’t know…! I-I’ve just seen some *weird* things, is all…”

Bojack: “Me too. Uh, probably not whatever weird shit you’re talking about, though.”

Retsuko: “Um, this may be a silly thing to say, but I don’t recall seeing anything at the beach that could’ve been used to strangle Walter.”

Hiroshi: “She is correct. If it was hidden in the sand, I’m certain we would’ve identified it during our little escapade.”

Saiki: “ *Oh, it was an ‘escapade’, alright…* ”

Kaidou: “H-Hey! The Jet Black Wings will prove to you my might! Mark my words!”

Bojack: “Got any ideas, Jesse?”

Ena: “The most suspicious of them all has been singled out!”

Jesse: “I don’t fuckin’ know, ‘cuz I ain’t the killer! Anyway, you’re all forgettin’ about that one thing!”

Mai: “Oh, what one thing?”

Jesse: “The case! The aluminium case we used to store the tools! It was wide open, wasn’t it? Mr. White definitely locked it last night – I saw it with my own damn eyes!”

Natsuki: “Yeah, and why was Walter holding a tool if he was being attacked, anyway?”

Kurumada: “Jesus, makin’ this more confusing for us, are ya?”

Latte: “If the case was opened during the murder, does that mean the killer used a tool to attack Walter?”

L: “Unlikely. Not a single wound on Walter can be traced back to it being caused by any of the tools in the case, which can be backed up by the Nesos File only mentioning the neck and arm wounds.”

Yuri: “Can we trust the Nesos File, however?”

L: “That’s a good point. However, I am inclined to believe the file is factual to a degree where Nesos cannot be accounted for in any false-doings during the trial. If a weak point could be directed to their fault, we’d have the upper hand in requesting a mistrial. And with such diligence in their efforts towards this death game, it’s unlikely they’d wish to take such a risk.”

Bojack: “Christ, Sherlock. Think you could save the filler for later?”

Monotora: “If there’s anyone you can trust, it’s Nesos!”

Kurumada: “Why should we trust you bastards when you lied to us in the letters in the first damn place?!”

Monotora: “Kehehe!”

Hayasaka: “A-As well as that, the hammer has no blood on it. In fact, it was completely spotless.”

Mai: “Spotless, did you say? Well, that’s a bit odd. Surely it’d have sawdust on it even if it wasn’t used.”

Kaidou: “Then it was used!”

Natsuki: “In what way if it wasn’t a weapon?!”

Ena: “Aaa! The shouting match has begun! Please don’t get it in my ears!”

L: “I propose we don’t become distracted on how it was used, and more so on who could’ve gotten access to it.”

Hayasaka: (“Who had access to the weapon? From what I know, there’s only one possible person who could…”)

OPEN TOOL CASE

Hayasaka: “Hearing the albis of the boat production team, Walter kept the key to the case on him at all times. Therefore, the only person I could see getting the hammer was, well, *him* .”

Jesse: “But I thought Mr. White was coughin’ up his damn organs at the time!”

Hiroshi: “Perhaps the killer stole the key while Walter was vulnerable in order to retrieve the weapon.”

Kurumada: “But then it’d be a game of findin’ the damn key before Walter came to.”

Bojack: “Jesse could’ve known.”

Jesse: “Go suck a fat one!”

Bojack: “Are you fifteen? God, this is the thanks I get for standing beside you…”

Hayasaka: “A-Again, I don’t think that’s likely. Even if the killer did know where the key was, they wouldn’t have the time to take it *and* proceed to strangle Walter all at once.”

Yuri: “And if the killer never attacked Walter with the hammer… T-Then I guess Walter is the only one who could’ve retrieved it after all.”

Latte: “But how was it possible for Walter to get the hammer if he was being strangled at the time?”

Natsuki: “Are we wrong again?!”

L: “No, it’s actually rather simple. Somehow, Walter must’ve managed to escape the killer’s grasp in order to retrieve the hammer.”

Kaidou: “H-He escaped the killer? Ah! Walter is much more powerful than I initially assumed!”

Jesse: “Mr. White doesn’t go down without a fight, yo! I knew somethin’ was wrong about all this! He wouldn’t just succumb like that!”

Saiki: “ *With all the stuff we haven’t even mentioned yet, it’s obvious Walter wasn’t just strangled to death* .”

Ena: “Ah, I’m getting sleepy. This trial is too long!”

Monotora: “Sleeping is strictly prohibited during an executive trial! If I see your eyes shut for more than a second, I’ll rip you to pieces until you’re nothing but pierced organs on the floor!”

Ena: “Nooo! Not my organs!! Wah!”

Kaidou: “C’mon, team! Let us begin another discussion!”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Retsuko: “So how did Walter get free?"

Kurumada: “He must’ve fought back somehow to get the upper hand.”

Yuri: “I would find that difficult being strangled, though. Wouldn’t the killer be harder to attack behind you?”

Natsuki: “Why do you even know that, Yuri?”

Yuri: “N-No special reason, really. Just, um, novels…”

Mai: “And since this had to have taken place before Walter had any weapons on hand, it’s unlikely he could attack the killer back.”

Kurumada: “Well how the hell did he escape?!”

L: “Think about it oppositely: what if the **killer themselves were stunned**?”

Bojack: “That’s the point, genius. We’re saying Walter stunned the killer.”

L: “...My goodness.”

Hayasaka: (“Walter definitely had to have escaped. But… perhaps through not his own means…”)

BURNT BOAT AND WOOD PILE

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I think I understand what L is trying to say. Instead of Walter being the direct cause of the killer’s distraction, I believe something more natural was the case.”

Brian: “Oh! Um, are you talking about the fire?”

Latte: “Wasn’t the killer the one to cause the fire in the first place?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, the fire on the wood pile, but not the one on the *boat* .”

Kurumada: “Finally! The boat has a damn purpose!”

Natsuki: “Wait, what? What do you mean by that?”

Hayasaka: “We know the killer intended to light the wood pile on fire. But, so far, we don’t have an explanation for how the boat caught alight.”

Retsuko: “Wait… are you saying the initial fire spread to the boat?”

Bojack: “What the hell? *Seriously* ?”

Mai: “We did say the bacardi was a very flammable substance! I’m sure it would’ve spread to the trees too if it were close enough!”

Saiki: “ *That’s morbid.* ”

Monotora: “I condone all types of arson, as long as it doesn’t get into my territory!”

L: “It took a while, but we eventually got there. Yes, I do believe the fire had spread to create something a lot bigger and more dangerous – something the killer had not expected to occur at all.”

Natsuki: “That makes way more sense than someone actually wanting to sabotage the boat – you’d be an idiot to do that to our only way home!”

Kaidou: “I see, and the killer then got distracted by the fire!”

Kurumada: “And ‘cuz of that fuck up, Walter was able to wiggle his way ‘outta the killer’s grasp?”

Hayasaka: “It’s what I imagine to have happened…”

Jesse: “Shit, I knew Mr. White wouldn’t have gone down so easily! Well, now we know for sure who the killer is!”

Brian: “Huh? H-How?”

Jesse: “Well, whoever’s got any injuries on them right now’s gotta be the fuckin’ culprit!”

Yuri: “I-I don’t see anyone with any injuries, though…”

Mai: “I suppose just because he got the hammer, doesn’t mean he successfully attacked the killer.”

Jesse: “...Shit. What the hell, man?”

Bojack: “Eh. You win some, you lose some. Kinda like my dad.”

Hayasaka: “...So all in all, the hammer was a mere failed attempt on Walter’s part–”

Retsuko: “Hold on!!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “R-Retsuko…?”

Retsuko: “Forgive me for butting in, Hayasaka. I know that looks pretty rude of me, huh? But, I want to help solve this case just as much as everyone else! The thing is… I have a little rebuttal to that idea of yours.”

Kurumada: “Why’re ya doubting him outta all people?”

Retsuko: “I-I’m not doubting him specifically! I just wanted to bring up something important you overlooked…”

Monotora: “Oh! How excitin’!”

Hayasaka: (“This is new… I-I’m not sure if I particularly enjoy being singled out like this. However, whatever Retsuko has to say, I need to see if it’s correct or not…”)

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Retsuko: “Honestly, I just don’t think it’s right to say Walter’s attempt to attack the killer was a complete failure, don’t you think?”

Hayasaka: “That would be the case, but no one here has any signs of injuries from a potential attack, nor is there any blood on the hammer…”

Retsuko: “But there’s something strange about the hammer – it was still in Walter’s grasp! If Walter screwed up, then surely he would’ve dropped it at some point. But, he’s still **holding it perfectly**…!”

HAMMER IN RIGHT HAND

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “T-The point you made is valid, Retsuko. However, Walter actually wasn’t holding the hammer correctly when we discovered the body…”

L: “What kind of person intending to attack holds a hammer upside down in their hand?”

Retsuko: “...Oh. I didn’t actually notice that. I’m sorry…”

Hayasaka: “It’s okay, Retsuko. It’s not like I was all that eager to look over the body in more detail myself, haha…”

Bojack: “Okay, but, can you blame her, though? She doesn’t actually have hands to tell.”

Retsuko: “I have paws! They work the same, you know!”

Bojack: “...Do you have thumbs?”

Retsuko: “Of course I do! How else would I hold anything?”

Bojack: “Shit. Colour me surprised.”

Retsuko: “ *sigh* …”

Latte: “So why was this misplaced hammer in Walter’s grip?”

Kurumada: “The killer ‘prolly planted it there after Walter died so it looked like he tried to attack the killer or somethin’.”

Natsuki: “They couldn’t spare a moment to actually place it the right way up?”

Yuri: “T-The killer only had fifteen minutes before the nighttime hours after Walter died; perhaps they were in a rush to get back to the hotel?”

Mai: “Oh, don’t forget that bag of glass shards! That must’ve taken some time to collect off of the sand, so I suppose the killer didn’t have much time remaining.”

Saiki: “ *I’m unsure if you’re trying to justify the killer’s actions or not* …”

Hiroshi: “Back to our original topic, if we’re proposing Walter was unsuccessful in attacking the culprit, how come this was the case?”

Kaidou: “The killer must’ve been ready to fight back immediately!”

L: “‘Immediately’ is a stretch at best. If the culprit was not expecting the boat to catch fire, then they certainly weren’t aware of how to deal with their escapee.”

Kurumada: “That sounds off to me. The killer couldn’t have been *that* distracted – or else wouldn’t Walter have been as well?”

Bojack: “Maybe Walter didn’t give much of a shit about his boat we thought.”

Jesse: “Bullshit! That was our only way outta here, asshole!”

Natsuki: “Jeeze, if all you’re going to do is fight, we’re going to get nowhere!”

Ena: “Ah, circles, circles! The circles are back! I can’t deal with the overwhelming geometry!”

Kurumada: “Stop arguin’ and focus on the trial!”

Jesse: “Mr. White doesn’t lay down and take it!”

Ena: “All the fuzzy noise is going to make my ears explode!”

Hayasaka: (“A-Ah goodness, everyone’s begun to talk over each other… Well, if anything, I can use this to my advantage. I’m used to listening in big crowds. Perhaps I’ll be able to pick out something helpful…”)

MASS PANIC DEBATE

Kurumada: “Do you wanna solve this damn trial or not?!”

Jesse: “There’s no way in hell Mr. White was stunned a second time!”

Ena: “I can’t take it anymore!”

Mai: “Calm down, Kurumada! What did we say about your anger issues?”

L: “And why don’t you think it’s possible?”

Latte: “Oh, Ena! Please calm down!”

Kurumada: “What anger issues?!”

Jesse: “Obviously Mr. White’s gonna avoid the killer if he knows they’re gonna try n’ **strangle him again**.”

Kaidou: “Y-Yeah! We don’t wanna repeat what happened yesterday!”

Bojack: “Gee, I wonder what ‘anger issues’…”

Brian: “I-I guess that’s true… Even though we don’t know what the weapon even is yet.”

Ena: “I’m terribly sorry for the outburst, dear friends!”

Hayasaka: (“I see… I-Ignoring Kurumada’s shouting, I think someone’s on the wrong tracks here…”)

GLASS SHARD IN NECK

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, Jesse, it’s unlikely the killer attempted strangulation a second time.”

Jesse: “Then what the hell happened?”

L: “If you think about it logically, you are correct that Walter would be on guard to avoid the culprit’s strangling. But, that doesn’t mean the culprit was out of options.”

Latte: “But what else could they have done? They didn’t have another weapon on hand, did they?”

Hayasaka: “Not on hand. But, there definitely would be a lot of choices around them at the time…”

Kaidou: “Oh, you mean the glass!”

Saiki: “ *I’m surprised he got something right for once.* ”

Kaidou: “Of course! The killer sliced it into his neck like a throwing star! Using their excellent throw as the Ultimate– um, there’s no Ultimate Ninja, is there…?”

Saiki: “ *Nevermind* …”

Hiroshi: “As we’ve previously established that the bacardi bottle would’ve smashed on impact after being thrown, the shards would’ve scattered all around the sand. The culprit would’ve had the opportunity to pick up the closest shard and stab Walter in order to stun him from attacking them.”

L: “I couldn’t have explained it better myself. Although, it’s more or less obvious from the presence of the smaller shards lying around that they were present.”

Bojack: “They just keep trying to one-up each other, huh…”

Natsuki: “So what happened after that? After the killer stabbed Walter with the glass, I mean.”

Brian: “Now that Walter was stunned again, could the killer have gone back to strangling him?”

Kurumada: “With that big ass piece of glass in his neck?”

Brian: “O-Oh yeah…”

Mai: “So instead of strangling Walter again, the killer did something else, hm?”

L: “If we deduct the wounds we’ve explained thus far, there’s only one option left.”

Hayasaka: (“...Then, it must be *that* , right?”)

LEFT ARM BURN MARKS

Hayasaka: “You’re referring to the burn marks on his left arm, r-right?”

Kaidou: “D-Does that mean the killer pushed Walter into the fire?!”

Ena: “Nooo! He was burned to medium rare!”

Jesse: “What the fuck is wrong with this killer, yo? Why did they have to be so damn brutal?”

Retsuko: “But why did the killer push Walter into the fire?”

Yuri: “It would’ve been an easy way of finishing him off, wouldn’t it?”

Saiki: “ *That’s dark coming from someone like you* .”

Yuri: “I-I’m sorry! I’ve seen worse outcomes in novels before, anyhow…!”

Saiki: “ *Is that supposed to make it better?* ”

Hayasaka: “I don’t necessarily believe that’s what killed Walter in the end. Since the burn marks were only concentrated on his arm, it’s unlikely he would’ve died from that.”

Jesse: “So what did? Was it like, a mixture of all the wounds?”

Bojack: “Maybe he died from the shock. Couldn’t have been all that good for him on top of the cancer.”

Retsuko: “I don’t think you can die from, um, shock…”

Natsuki: “But then what’s left to discuss? We can’t be stuck this far into the trial, or else all this time would’ve been for nothing!”

Hiroshi: “Is there a time limit to this trial?”

Monotora: “Until I, or Nesos, get bored I guess! So, keep us entertained, you prey!”

Kurumada: “Stop callin’ us ‘prey’, you bastard!”

Hayasaka: (“If we can’t figure out Walter’s cause of death, does that mean we won’t be able to solve this case…? But, what else can we do…?”)

L: “...What would Walter do after being pushed into the fire?”

Brian: “H-Huh?”

Bojack: “I dunno – sit there and take it?”

Jesse: “Bullshit!”

Latte: “If I was in such a situation, I’d try to find a way to put myself out as quickly as possible…!”

Mai: “Oh, do you think Walter attempted the same?”

L: “It’s likely Walter managed to put out the fire on his arm, or else we would’ve found it burnt to an unrecognisable crisp.”

Yuri: “H-How disturbing…”

Kaidou: “But how did he put himself out? He couldn’t have known any fire aid-type spells… Unless–!”

Saiki: “ *The ocean was right behind him* .”

Kaidou: “Oh. Oh yeah. The ocean. O-Of course–I was just getting to that!”

Kurumada: “Alright, so Walter ran to the ocean to put himself out. Then what?”

L: “...Do you still not realise what I’m trying to point at here?”

Hayasaka: (“What does L mean? Coming out with quite the question, only to expect us to realise something about the–...Oh. *Oh my god* .”)

Mai: “Hayasaka? Are you alright…?”

Hayasaka: “... *Drowned* .”

Retsuko: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: “Walter… T-The killer drowned Walter, didn’t they?”

Natsuki: “E-Eh?!”

Jesse: “Huh?! Where the hell’s this even coming from?”

L: “I had always found it suspicious how the cause of death was left unnamed in the Nesos File. If you think about it, the only fatal wound on Walter would’ve been the bruising caused by strangulation. Therefore, it was something that couldn’t even be seen, even with a basic autopsy of the body.”

Hiroshi: “If you knew that, then why didn’t you reveal it sooner…?”

L: “I needed to stall the trial for a while as I collected my thoughts. That isn’t to say this time hasn’t been useful: it’s helped me identify some competent individuals indeed.”

Kurumada: “Wait, wait – hold on a second. So the true cause of death was *drownin’* ?”

Mai: “That would explain why the hammer was clean… If Walter was still holding onto it at the time, the sawdust would’ve gotten washed off by the ocean water.”

Ena: “Perhaps he still held malice in his burning mind!”

Latte: “If Walter was drowned in the ocean, then why was his body found at the shore?”

Hayasaka: “T-The culprit… must’ve dragged Walter back to shore. It was most likely to hide the fact that the ocean had anything to do with the case in the first place.”

Yuri: “Walter would have all night to dry off as well, so we wouldn’t know he had been in the water…”

Bojack: “Shit. Wait, so does this mean we’ve figured out the entire case?”

Jesse: “We–we have? Then, can we figure out who the killer is?”

L: “We’ve solved the order of events, and most of the weapons used. All except for whatever the culprit used to strangle Walter…”

Brian: “So how do we figure out what it was?”

Kaidou: “Ah! Allow me to aid you all! The Jet Black Wings has stayed quiet for too long… and now, it’s time I help you all figure out the true mystery behind this case!”

Saiki: “ *You’re more helpful when you don’t talk...* ”

L: “Actually… Hm, yes. I think this will suffice. Hayasaka, I have a favour to ask of you.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? M-Me?”

L: “Yes. I need some more time to crack this solution, but I believe a new type of discussion will leave Nesos very entertained while they wait.”

Monotora: “Oh really now? Hehe…”

Hayasaka: “I-I guess I don’t mind helping…” (“Although, I’m not sure why he picked me to help…”)

L: “Good. Then, as Kaidou has volunteered to help as well, he’ll be my partner for this experiment.”

Kaidou: “E-Eh?”

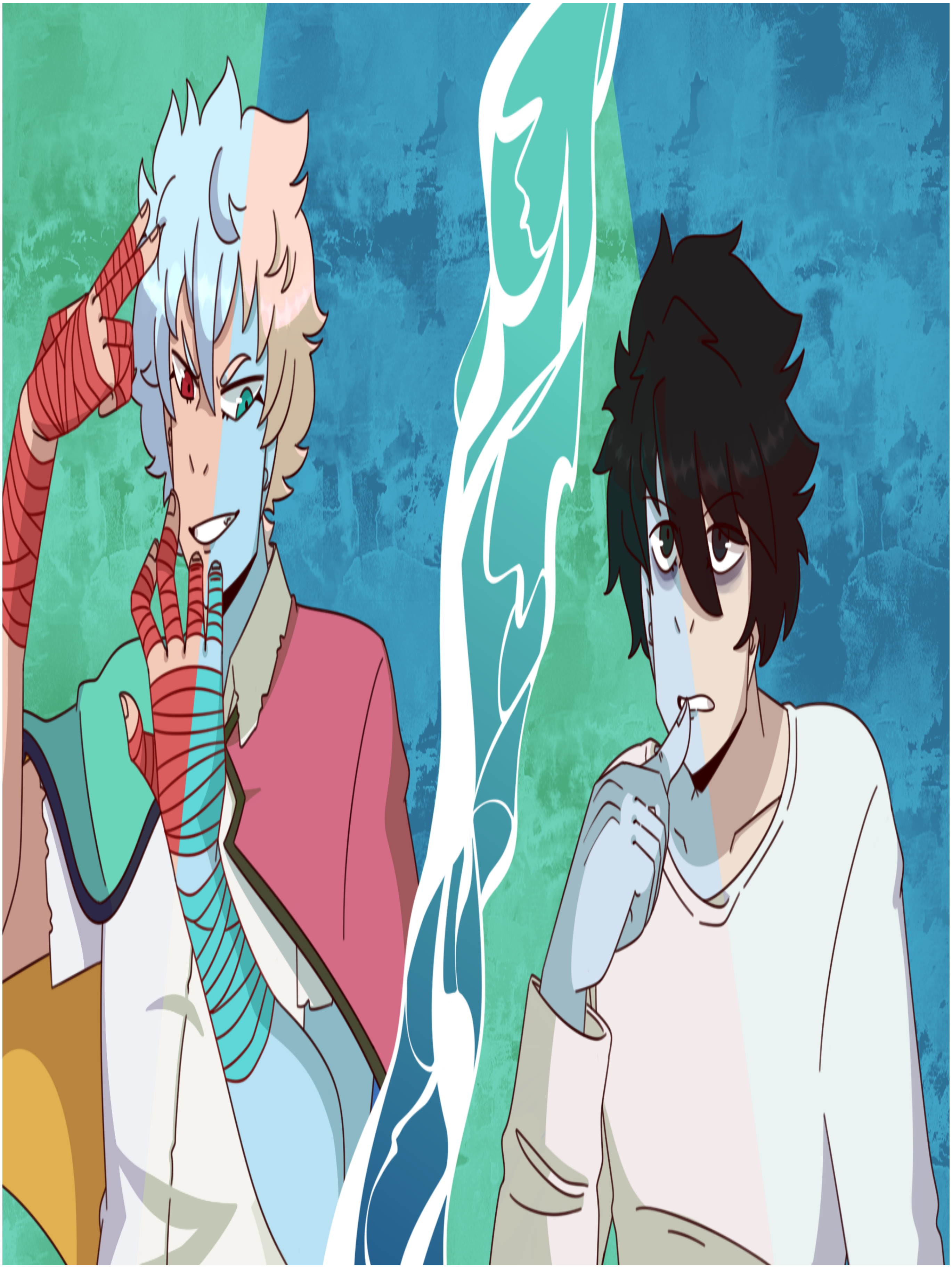
L: “Not to worry – this is nothing hard. We will just discuss potential weapon ideas, that’s all.”

Kaidou: “Oh, I can do that! Piece of cake!”

L: “Hayasaka, I want to see if you can scew the discussion to see if we can come to an compromise.”

Hayasaka: (“Why is L trying to entertain Nesos? Will they really stop the trial if they find it boring? Regardless, I don’t want to screw up this far in…”)

BALANCE BATTLE



Kaidou: “The killer must’ve used dark shadow magic to strangle Walter!”

L: “We know bare hands were not used to strangle Walter.”

AFFIRM: L

Hayasaka: “L’s right – if it wasn’t done by hand, then the only other choice would have to be some sort of weapon.”

Kaidou: “Then it had to have been rope! There were some at the supermarket, right?”

L: “There are quite a lot of choices around the island to use as a strangulation tool…”

DENY: KAIDOU

Hayasaka: “I don’t think that makes sense, Kaidou. If rope was used, then why wasn’t it found at the scene?”

Kaidou: “The killer discarded it elsewhere! Perhaps a portal to the netherworld?”

L: “A rope isn’t something someone can easily hide on their person…”

DENY: KAIDOU

Hayasaka: “But that in itself is strange, Kaidou. Every other piece of evidence – the glass shards, the note – were all discarded at the scene of the crime.”

Kaidou: “Then the killer used invisibility on the weapon!”

L: “Perhaps the weapon is hiding in plain sight…”

AFFIRM: L

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, I think L is right. If the weapon wasn’t found at the beach, then it must be something we wouldn’t have thought to check…!”

BREAK

Monotora: “Ahaha! That sure was an excitin’ talk!”

Natsuki: “But what did we learn from that exactly?”

Mai: “Are you saying the weapon is something unconventional? Oh, I wouldn’t have expected that!”

Ena: “Something the killer could hide right in front of our eyes… without us even noticing! How were we to know?”

Retsuko: “Do we really have to go back to the beach after all to double check everything again?”

Bojack: “I’m too tired. You can go, though.”

Yuri: “I didn’t happen to see anything appropriate at the beach, however…”

Kurumada: “Yeah, nothin’ there was long or flexible enough to wrap around Walter’s neck to strangle him.”

Jesse: “Then what the hell could it even be then?!”

Hayasaka: “...”

L: “...This is very interesting indeed. Alright then, let me restate what we know about the weapon: unconventional, able to be hidden in plain sight, but long and flexible enough to strangle Walter with. Has anyone figured it out yet?”

Natsuki: “Why do you keep asking us if we know?! This isn’t some quiz game, you know.”

Hayasaka: (“... *Ah* . I know. Well, I think I know. But, how do I say it? How do I… confront the *killer* ?”)

Kurumada: “Hayasaka? Is there somethin’ you realised?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “You can tell me. Or, uh, us. Just take a deep breath.”

Hayasaka: (“...Okay. H-Here I go…”)

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “...Did you kill Walter, *Hiroshi* ?”

Hiroshi: “...”

Kaidou: “H-Huh?! Hiroshi?”

Retsuko: “That was a little left-field, if I have to be honest…”

Latte: “You’re convicting Hiroshi out of nowhere so suddenly? Why?”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s not–It’s not out of nowhere. From the description of the weapon, it has to be an article of clothing, right?”

Mai: “Oh, I get that! If the weapon was something you could wear, then it definitely could be hidden in plain sight.”

Yuri: “A-And simultaneously could have the properties of a strangulation tool.”

Kurumada: “And since Hiroshi’s always walkin’ around with that big ass scarf that can definitely wrap around someone’s neck, that’s why you think it’s him?”

Hiroshi: “...”

Jesse: “If he really is Mr. White’s killer, then–!”

Bojack: “Easy tiger.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m sorry, Hiroshi. That was a far-fetched idea from me, I know. If you have any rebuttals, please let me know I’m wrong.”

Hiroshi: “...”

Natsuki: “Well?”

Hiroshi: “...Your idea was far-fetched, Mr. Hayasaka. Completely so, in fact. For there is not just my scarf that makes for an addiquiette weapon, but your and Brian’s ties can also work as strangulation tools.”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah…?”

Brian: “H-Hey! I don’t even like wearing this suit, anyway!”

Saiki: “ *How is that even a valid counter argument?* ”

Retsuko: “Um, but isn’t your scarf easier to remove than a tie is?”

Hiroshi: “That is an invalid point. The killer had all night to adjust their appearance back to normal. It is a weak argument.”

Kaidou: “H-Hiroshi…?”

L: “You appear to be acting rather hostile to Hayasaka’s claim…”

Hiroshi: “What? Should I not fight back to prove my innocence?”

Yuri: “I guess you have a point there…”

Jesse: “Then why the hell couldn’t you have not killed Mr. White? ‘Cuz from the way you’re actin’, you sure as hell seemed like you did it!”

Hiroshi: “Need I remind you the conditions for our culprit? Someone who had the opportunity to write Walter that note, someone without an alibi during 11:45P.M., either someone who owned or potentially stole Jesse’s lighter, and someone who knew about Walter’s cough to be able to have utilised the distraction method.”

L: “Those are all correct…”

Hiroshi: “And yet, I have an airtight alibi during the time of the murder. I was in the sports centre with Kaidou, Latte and Ena from 10P.M. to 12A.M. Therefore, I could not have gone to the beach in the first place.”

Latte: “He is right… He was with us the whole time.”

Hiroshi: “In fact, the only person who fits all the criteria is Jesse.”

Jesse: “It’s not me, man! Stop tryin’ to pin this onto me! Like–if you removed the whole ‘knowin’ about Mr. White’s cough’ from that list, then I wouldn’t be the prime suspect!”

Hiroshi: “That still condemns Mr. Hayasaka and Kurumada more than me in that scenario.”

Mai: “But it can’t be them, either!”

Kurumada: “Shit… We have no other leads, dammit!”

Hayasaka: (“Hiroshi is… correct, actually. Everything he’s said has been what we’ve figured out throughout the course of the trial. Then, is it not Hiroshi…?”)

L: “Hm… It’s all too perfect for you, isn’t it? A little too perfect, in fact.”

Hiroshi: “What do you mean…?”

L: “That all the evidence either stacks up against Jesse, or in turn, Hayasaka or Kurumada as you said.”

Natsuki: “Does it mean it has to be one of them?”

L: “...What if we were to remove a specific condition, in order to condemn the culprit?”

Retsuko: “We can figure out the killer by… ignoring one of the conditions?”

Bojack: “This guy’s just as convoluted as a Philbert plot.”

Latte: “Can you explain what you mean by that, L?”

L: “If we think about it, our natural suspect for Walter’s killer would automatically be Jesse, just by association alone. Perhaps the culprit wanted to convince everyone this was the case by setting up all these criteria for the culprit’s identity. However, one condition in particular has kept them safe all this time – from the beginning of the trial, even.”

Kaidou: “Huh? Which one is it?”

Brian: “It can’t be the note, right? That was how the killer lured Walter to the beach in the first place.”

Yuri: “I-I don’t think it can be the knowledge about the cough, or else the killer couldn’t have come up with that distraction plan with the fire.”

Jesse: “And the killer sure as hell needed that lighter – or else they’d have jack to light the bottle with.”

Hayasaka: “...That only leaves the alibis.”

L: “Correct.”

Natsuki: “Looks like someone wasn’t being entirely truthful with their account…”

Hiroshi: “I can assure you that I have been explicitly truthful during this trial. The only individuals here with alibis are me, Kaidou, Latte and Ena.”

Kurumada: “Hey, kid. Can you remind us about your training ‘sesh or whatever? Are you sure you didn’t see anyone leave?”

Kaidou: “U-Um, well… No. As I said, I didn’t see anyone leave during the whole two hours.”

Hiroshi: “Then how could I be the culprit, Kaidou?”

Kaidou: “...Yeah. He isn’t! Hiroshi isn’t the culprit! I never doubted him for a second!”

Latte: “I believe in Hiroshi! Why would a student kill an adult, anyway?”

Ena: “Our bonds have become strong! I cannot possibly doubt my friends!”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. They’re a gullible bunch* .”

Hayasaka: “...But, something about it all, I don’t think it adds up–”

Hiroshi: “Impossible!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “Hiroshi, w-why’re you…”

Hiroshi: “Mr. Hayasaka. Are you a poor judge of character, or are you simply trying to save your own back by suspecting me?”

Hayasaka: “N-No, that’s not–”

Hiroshi: “Then let me explain it clearly to you why it’s impossible for me to be the culprit.”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Hiroshi: “We know the culprit is undeniably someone who wrote Walter that note during the day, someone with access to a lighter, and found out about Walter’s cough.”

Hayasaka: “And yet, you can fit all three of those descriptions without fault…”

Hiroshi: “That would be the case, if not for my alibi. Since **I was with my team during the entire timeframe of the murder**, it is simply foolish to condemn me.”

KAIDOU’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the lie!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “...No, that isn’t entirely sound. There’s something I remember Kaidou said that hasn’t been accounted for yet.”

Kurumada: “Somethin’ about Ena freaking out on them, right?”

Natsuki: “Eh? What do you mean?”

Kaidou: “I guess I kinda forgot to mention, but the session wasn’t all that great when Ena broke out into a fight with Moony…”

Hiroshi: “...”

Ena: “Oh no, why is everyone’s eyes on me? Did I do something wrong? Or is it me doing nothing at all which is what I have done wrong?”

L: “Mind telling us what happened during this ‘fight’ of yours, Ena?”

Ena: “No! I cannot! If I expose Moony’s secrets, she’ll never forgive me!”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Ena! You’ll be helping us out if you tell us why she made you upset. You’ll be doing us all a huge favour.”

Ena: “If this will aid us, then… Apologies for the hesitance! While I had finally begun to delve into the true meaning of what wild card I truly was, Moony began to spout rudeness towards the team.”

Yuri: “Like what…?”

Ena: “Along such lines of our ‘horrible plan to stop Monotora’ and that we were ‘all going to die for it’... As such, the words pulled me into a nasty side of mine. I could not take such betrayal from my closest friend!”

L: “So you were pushed into a depressive episode. How severe was this?”

Kaidou: “It wasn’t something we had seen before. Ena began crying uncontrollably, running about and lashing out at us when we tried to calm them down…”

Latte: “We had to make sure they wouldn’t hurt us or themselves, you see.”

Ena: “Ah, I am so sorry for making you repeat this! I should just soak up the sadness and explode!”

L: “This means your full attention was on Ena at the time, correct?”

Kaidou: “Well, yeah…”

Brian: “Wait, if everyone was focused on Ena, then you wouldn’t know if someone slipped away!”

Hayasaka: “Kaidou, do you remember seeing Hiroshi when you were trying to calm Ena down?”

Kaidou: “Well of course I–Um… A-Actually, I don’t know.”

Latte: “I can’t seem to remember, either…”

Bojack: “Looks like someone’s been caught out.”

Hiroshi: “Hardly. That is not provable evidence at all. It’s a situation where they don’t remember if they saw me or not, not if they definitely didn’t see me.”

Jesse: “Why do you keep pressin’ on, for god’s sake? Why can’t you admit that you’re the killer?!”

Hiroshi: “ *Because I am not* .”

Kaidou: “Hiroshi…?”

Natsuki: “Is he the killer or not?!”

Mai: “Is there anything left that can prove one side over the other?”

Hiroshi: “If Kaidou, Latte and Ena all don’t remember, then there’s no indisputable proof that I can be even considered as suspicious in the first place.”

Hayasaka: (“...But, what if…?”)

Kurumada: “Hayasaka looks like he’s got somethin’.”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, I don’t really know if–”

Kurumada: “C’mon, give it a shot! Tell this kid what’s comin’ to him – one final knockout, y’know?”

Mai: “Is using a boxing metaphor really appropriate here?”

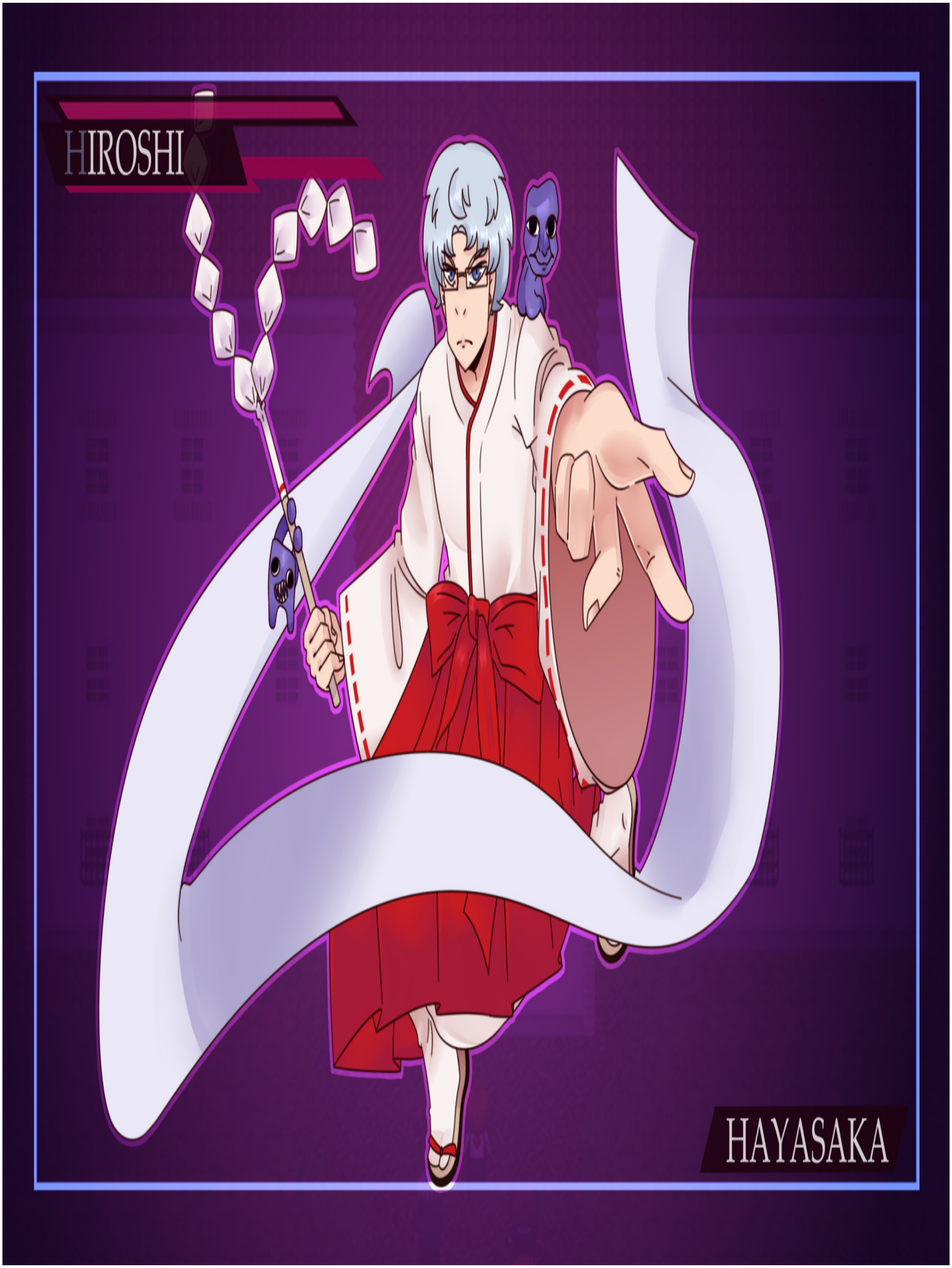
Kurumada: “Oi!”

Hayasaka: (“No, Kurumada is right. Perhaps I just need to… go for it? Even if I’m going against a kid, if what I know will condemn him as the culprit, then giving in now would damn us all.”)

Hiroshi: “I invite you to try, Mr. Hayasaka. But unfortunately, you’ll only make yourself a fool.”

Hayasaka: “Then… I’ll just have to try…!”

ARGUMENT ARMAMENT


HIROSHI
HAYASAKA

Hiroshi:

“To convict me as the culprit…”

“...Is merely based in lies.”

“For there is no proof against me.”

ADVANCE

“Saying that I strangled Walter with my own scarf is rather humorous.”

“You could even say I had the opportunity to do everything the culprit did.”

“And yet… It’s all impossible for it to be me, isn’t it?”

ADVANCE

“Scientifically impossible!”

“You’re attempting to push me into a corner when there is none to begin with!”

“My alibi is airtight – who can prove your claims?”

“My team doesn't remember seeing me, and yet I was there!”

“I didn’t kill Walter for I lacked the opportunity to go to the beach!”

“Your faulted logic is what will be your downfall!”

FINAL BLOW

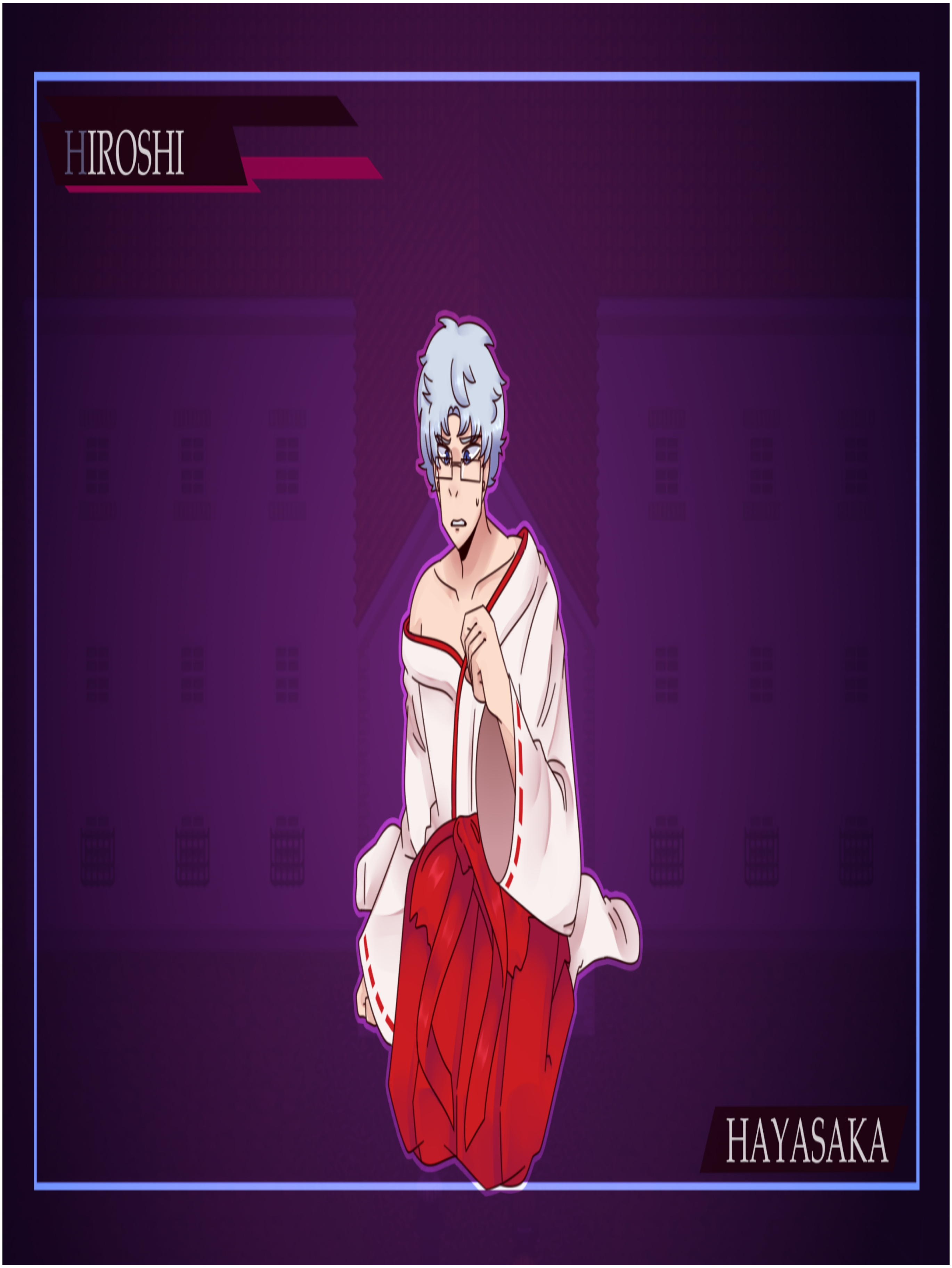
“Y-You… You can’t possibly say there was anyone else who could’ve seen me leave?”

MOONY

WAS

A

WITNESS


HIROSHI
HAYASAKA

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Hiroshi… I-It’s incredible how smart you are. And yet, how could you forget that Moony was there also…?”

Hiroshi: “...”

Bojack: “Moony? Who’s that again?”

Ena: “Moony! My dear companion friend!”

Yuri: “M-Moony was mentioned earlier in the trial… You don’t remember?”

Bojack: “I might have drank more scotch than I thought since then.”

Saiki: “ *I can definitely smell it…* ”

Natsuki: “And what does she have anything to do with this?”

Hayasaka: “Think about what Ena explained earlier, how Moony was the one to cause the fight… Is it likely she would’ve been focused on Ena at all?”

Kurumada: “Shit. Well, was she?”

Latte: “If I recall… Moony *had* floated off once she had said those cruel things about the group…”

L: “I also found it rather intriguing why Moony started this ‘fight’ in the first place. While often demeaning to Ena, she has never been known to go to such lengths like that. Perhaps someone pushed her into saying those things…”

Brian: “Why do you say that as if you understand her so well already…?”

Mai: “Oo, so all we have to do now is ask Moony her side of the story?”

Jesse: “Get her out here then!”

Ena: “Right on it, my good friends! Moony… Moony, it is time to wake up now. We have a case to solve!”

Retsuko: “Huh, I wonder why Moony is allowed to sleep in the trial since Monotora said we’re not allowed to…”

Monotora: “Eh, ain’t no fun ripping rocks to shreds. Not as meaty as flesh, kehe.”

Natsuki: “Urk, now I wish I didn’t know the answer…”

Moony: “...Ugh… What is it? Why’re all the uggos looking at me?”

L: “Don’t worry – we’ll make this quick. Moony, could you explain to us what happened last night at the sports centre? What caused you to trigger Ena?”

Moony: “Seriously? *That’s* what you woke me up for? Whatever… While Ena was ‘training’, some dude told me about the team’s plan to defeat that tiger, and it was so dumb that I got super angry at Ena for even thinking it was a good idea.”

Ena: “I’m so sorry, Moony! As a token of my apology, you may have the bed all to yourself tonight! The hard floor will be mine!”

Kurumada: “And this ‘some dude’, was?”

Moony: “I don’t know his name! The one with that really long scarf!”

Hiroshi: “...!”

Kaidou: “Hiroshi…?!”

Latte: “Did Hiroshi really do that…?”

Hiroshi: “...”

L: “It appears Hiroshi’s alibi is not so ‘air-tight’ after all. Knowing he was the one to influence this distraction upon the group, it left a chance for him to fled unnoticed, and complete the entire murder case before returning just before midnight. I have to hand it to you, Hayasaka. I didn’t think anyone else would catch on.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Natsuki: “He better not be saying he already knew *again…* ”

Jesse: “Who the hell cares?! We–we got our killer, right? Hiroshi’s the one who killed Mr. White, right?!”

Kaidou: “B-But–!”

L: “We can safely throw Hiroshi’s own words back at him. He had discovered Walter’s cough somehow, and stolen Jesse’s lighter to create the fire distraction.”

Hiroshi: “...”

Latte: “But, how about the alcohol? I don’t believe someone underage would know anything about bacardi!”

Saiki: “ *I mean, just look at Kaidou* …”

L: “And yet, he was quick to inform us about it earlier on in the trial…”

Hayasaka: (“He’s right…”)

FLASHBACK

L: “I’m surprised we’ve made it this far already. Regardless, we’re on the right track here. Alcohol can be quite the flammable substance – perfect for lighting something on fire, wouldn’t you agree?.”

Hiroshi: “And yet, can’t quite a lot of common alcohols be put out rather easily? Most won’t stay lit for long.”

FLASHBACK END

Kurumada: “Yeah, and not to mention the kid’s a damn genius with that mouth of his.”

Yuri: “I remember when he identified all that island flora, too…”

Bojack: “I bet that whole ‘lighting the bacardi on fire’ trick was in his range of expertise.”

Ena: “How talented!”

Brian: “And so what Hayasaka said, about his scarf being used to strangle Walter, was true…?”

Hiroshi: “...”

Kaidou: “N-No… There’s no way! I don’t believe Hiroshi could… could…”

Saiki: “ *You can’t seriously defend him after all this, can you* ?”

Latte: “But Hiroshi’s only a student! I could never see a student be so brutal as to kill someone!”

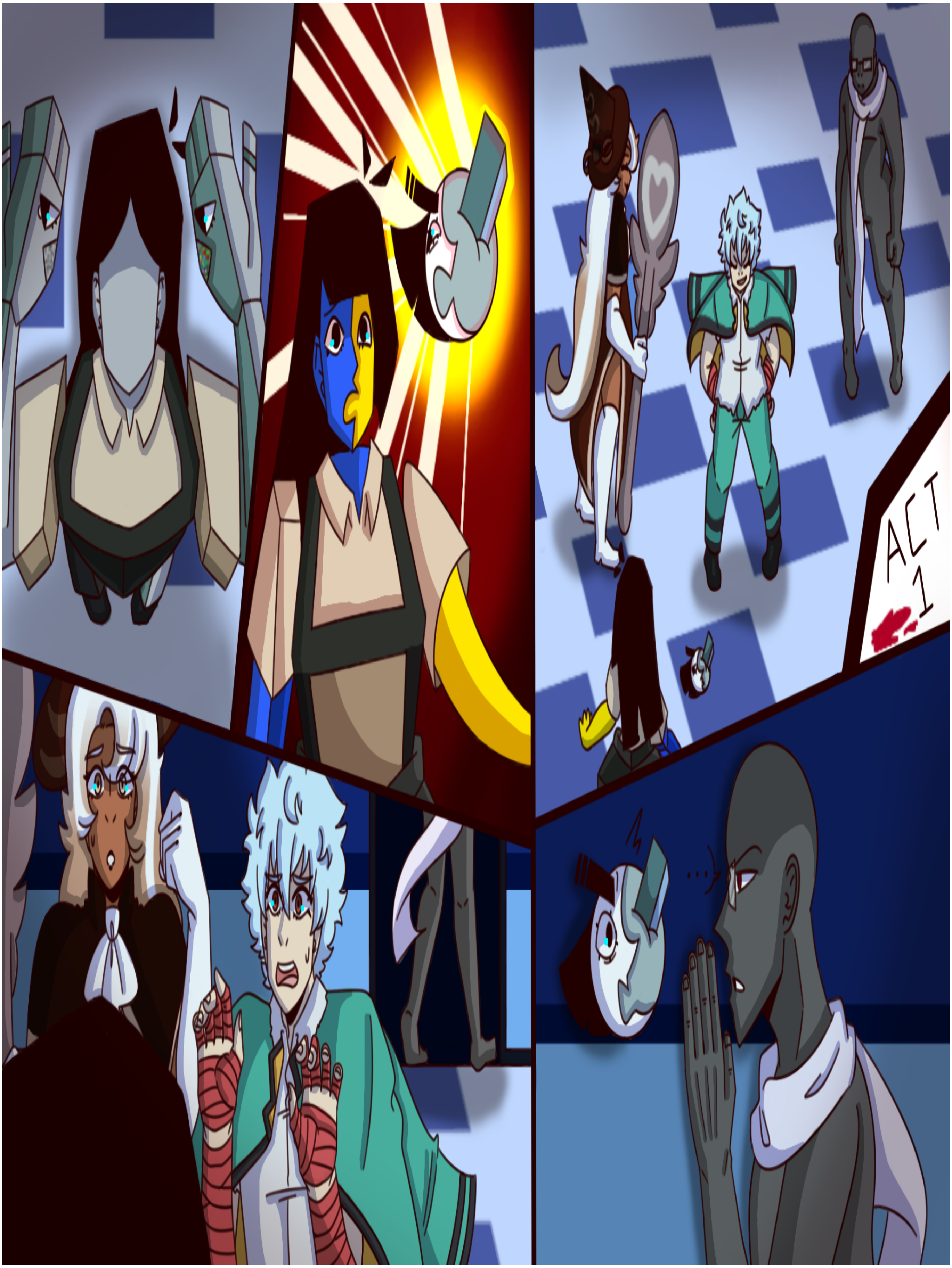
Mai: “Latte…”

Jesse: “...”

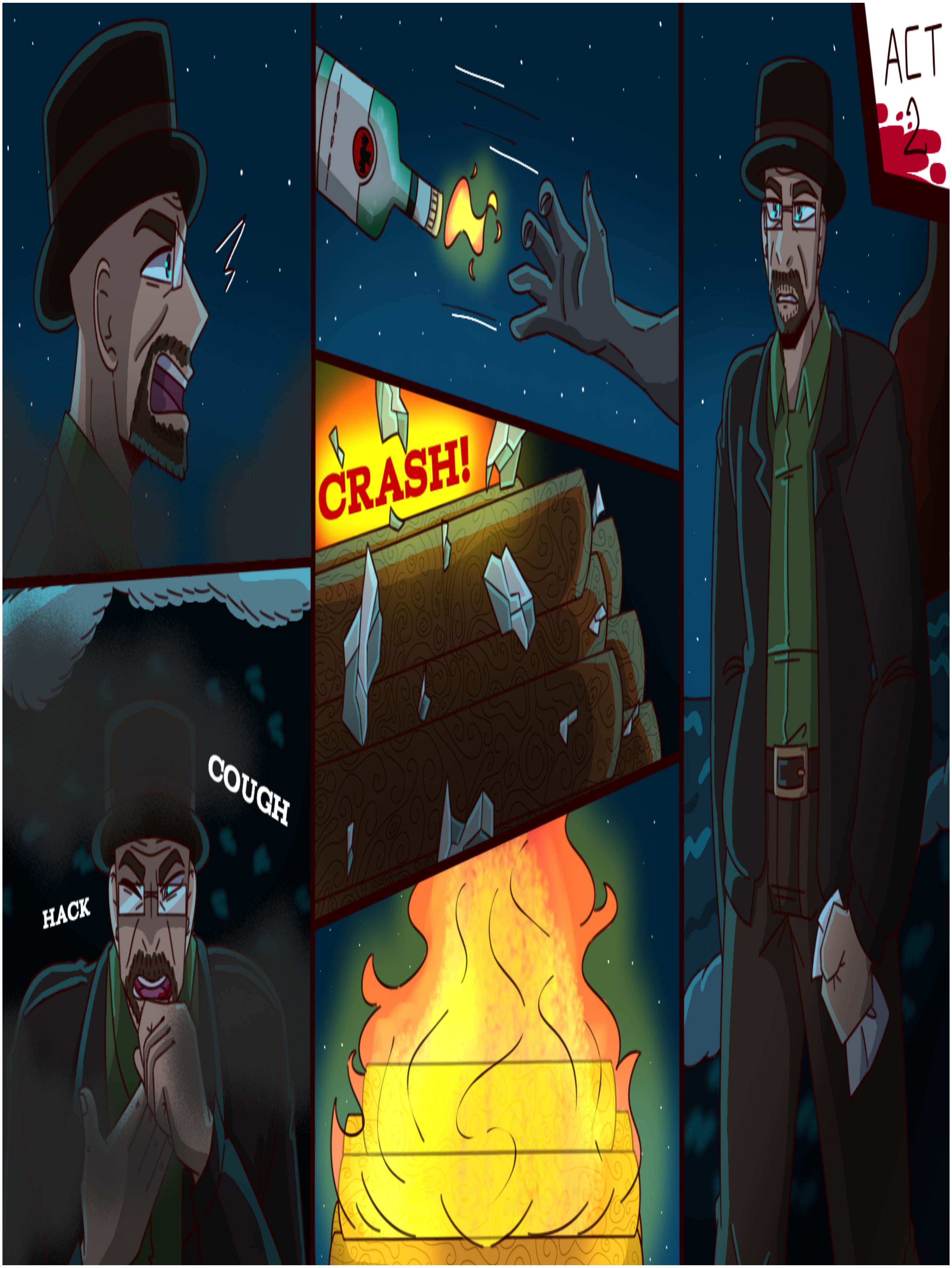
L: “...I see what’s going on here. After such a long time spent here, it’s easy to forget everything we’ve discussed from start to finish. In that case, I’ll run through everything – the timeline of events – so that everyone is on the same page.”

Hayasaka: (“I almost assumed he was going to force me to do it… Well, after everything we’ve discussed, let’s see if it all adds up…”)

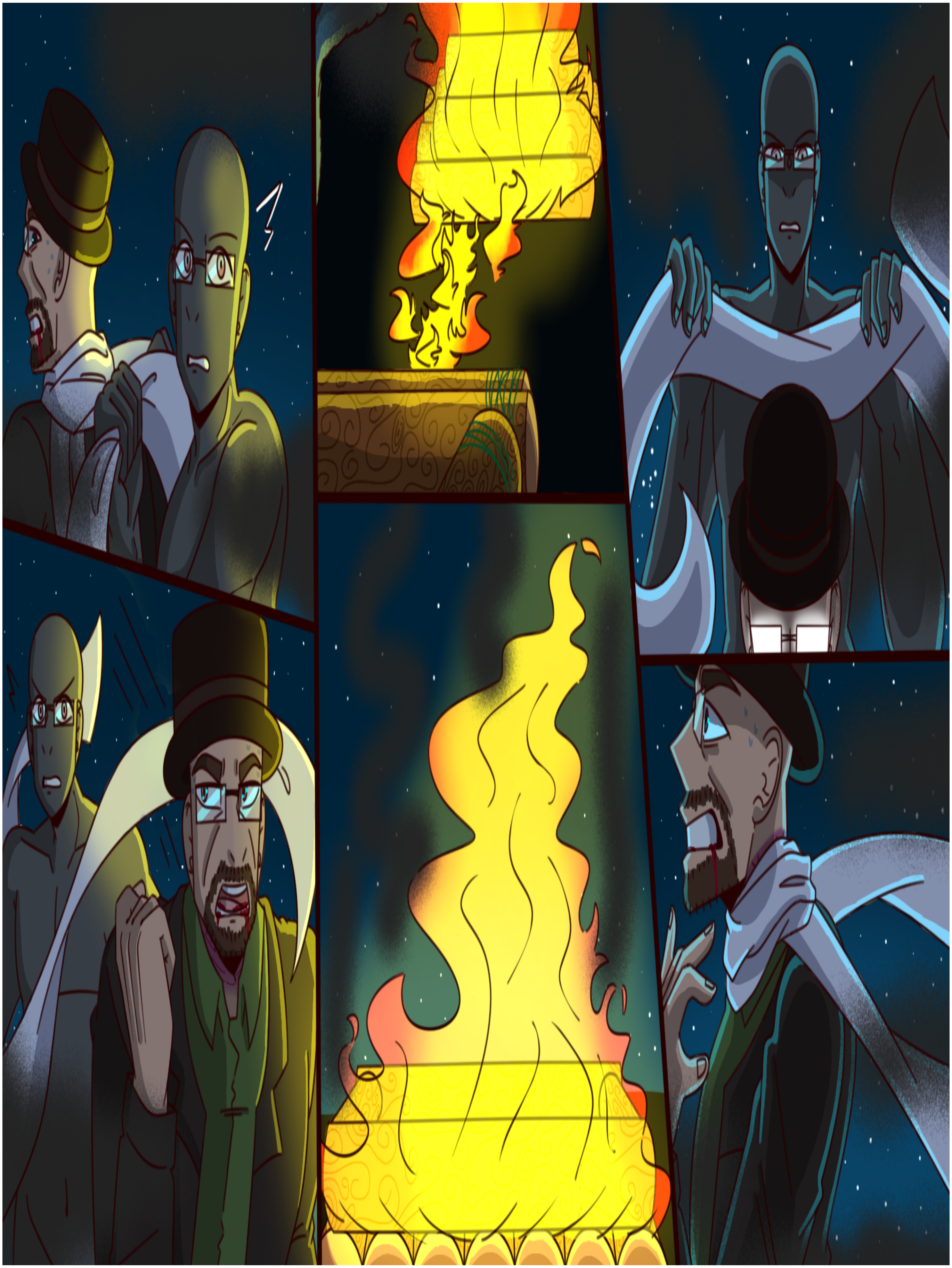
CLOSING ARGUMENT


ACT 1
...

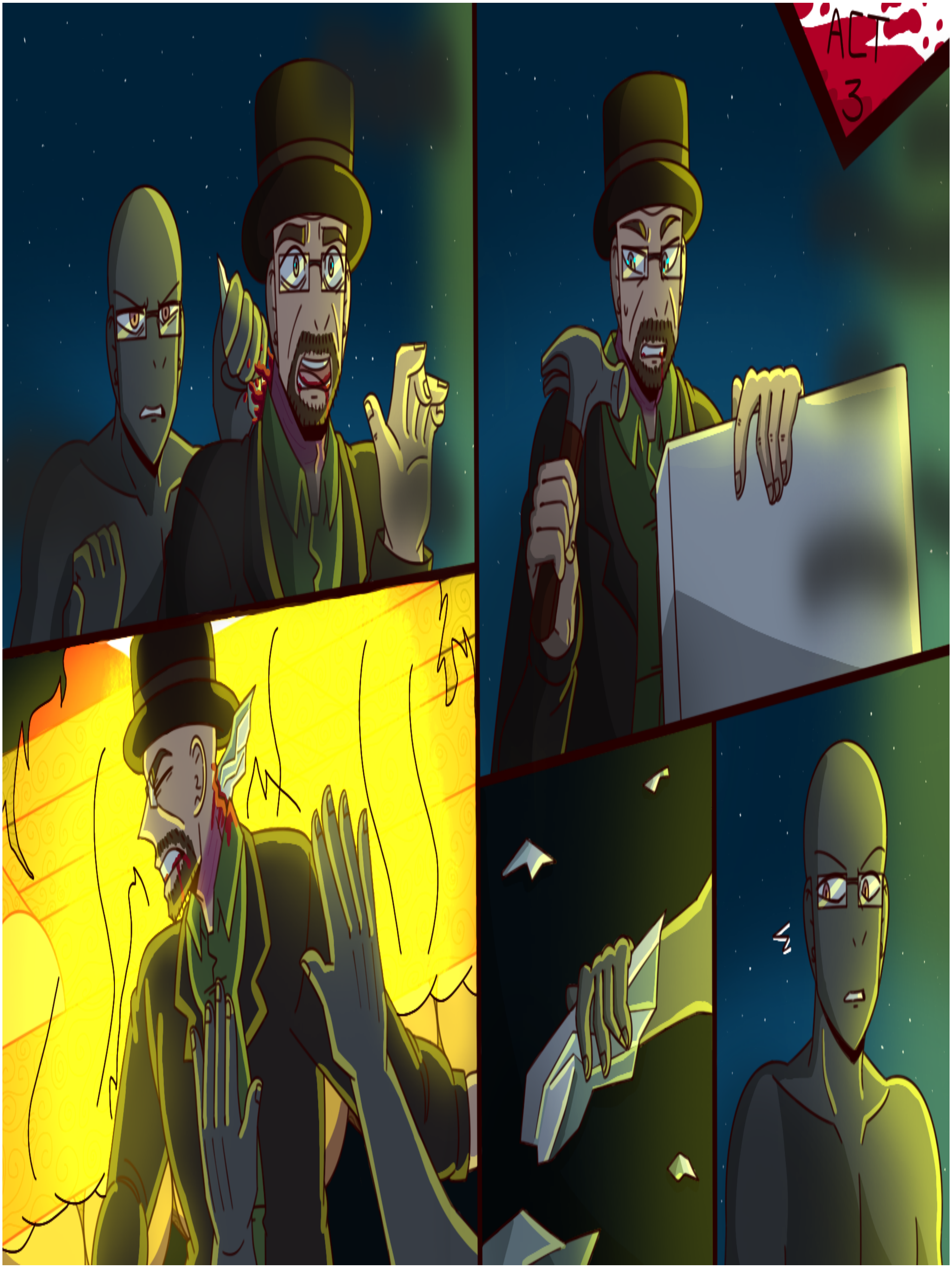
L: “Let’s start at the beginning of this case, shall we? It all began last night when the training session in the sports centre was abruptly interrupted when Moony was influenced by the culprit to throw Ena into a depressive episode. Distracting the entire group to deal with this endeavour, the culprit had a free opportunity to slip away unnoticed in order to commit their crime.”


CRASH!
HACK
COUGH
ACT 2

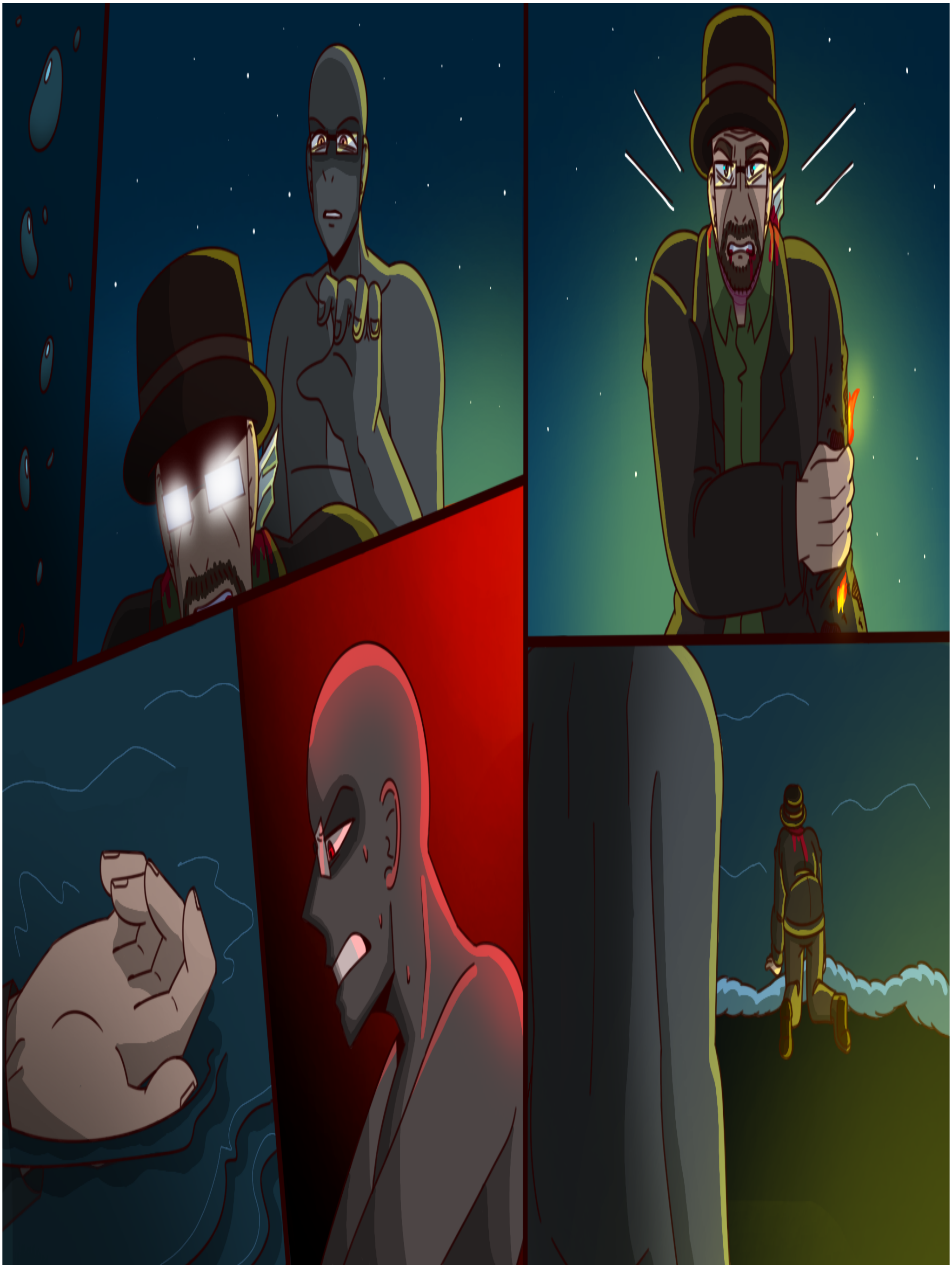
L: “The culprit then hid at the beach with a lighter stolen off of Jesse some time before – in order to frame him as the culprit – and bottle of alcohol in hand – specially a brand of bacardi – and waited for their victim to arrive. Having been slipped a note earlier on from the culprit as an anonymous blackmail, Walter must’ve felt threatened enough for whatever was written in said message to arrive at the beach late at night. This is when the culprit struck: they lit the highly flammable bacardi on fire and threw it at the unused pile of wood nearby to cause a fire, the impact resulting in the bottle smashing and sending shards of all sizes to scatter around the beach. While grabbing Walter’s attention initially, this was not the end of the culprit’s trick. As the culprit knew of Walter’s lung infection, they knew that the smoke would eventually trigger a coughing fit once inhaled, stunning Walter and causing him to become completely vulnerable.”



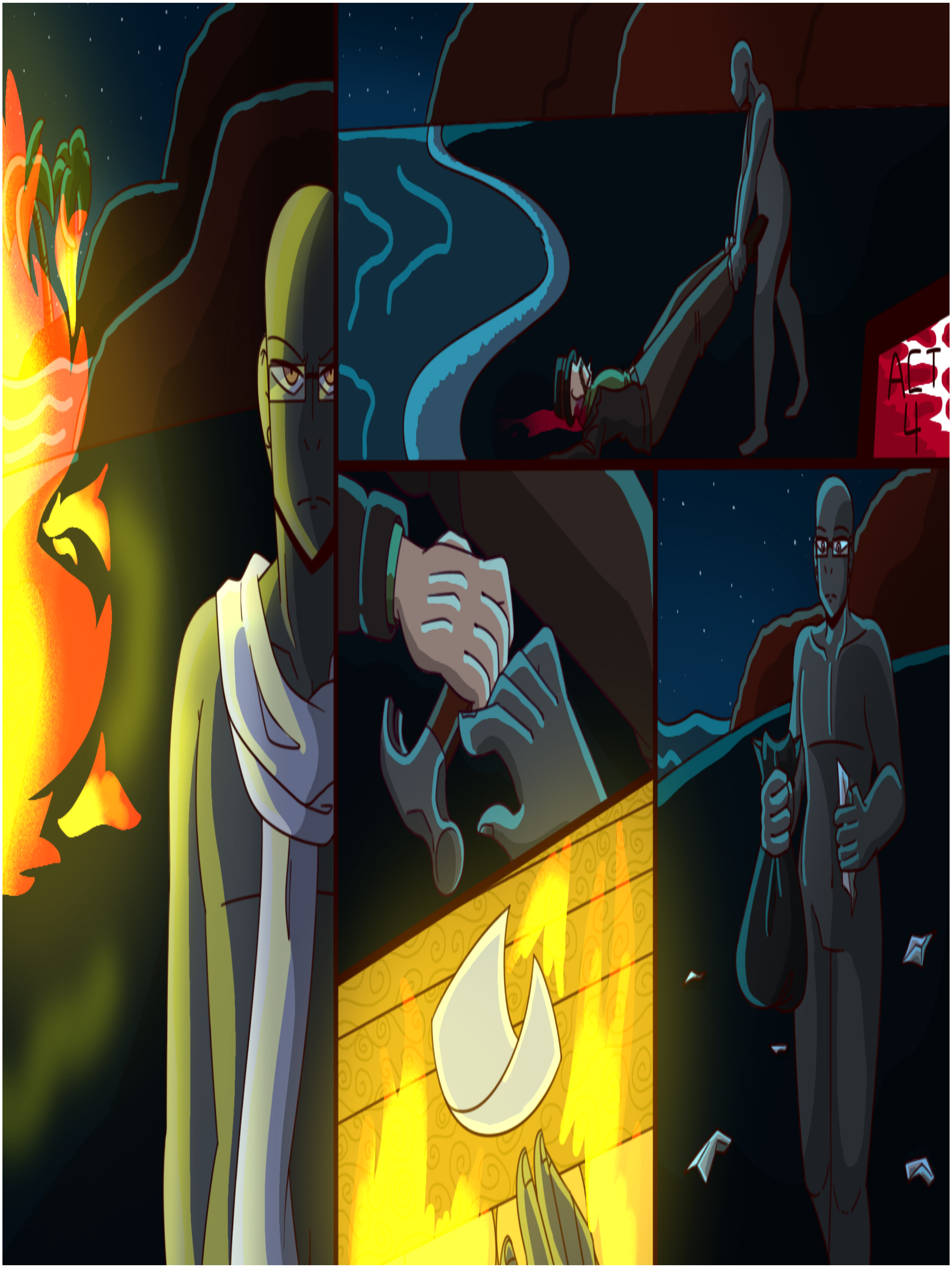
L: “While kneeled over, the culprit came onto the scene and wrapped their scarf around Walter’s neck, forcing him into a chokehold in order to strangle him. By utilising an article of clothing, the culprit would be able to hide the murder weapon in plain sight later on. While the culprit attempted to finish off Walter however, the fire from the wood had unexpectedly spread over to the boat nearby, starling both parties. While the culprit was distracted, Walter managed to get the upper hand and wriggle out of their grasp, escaping the chokehold.”


ALT 3

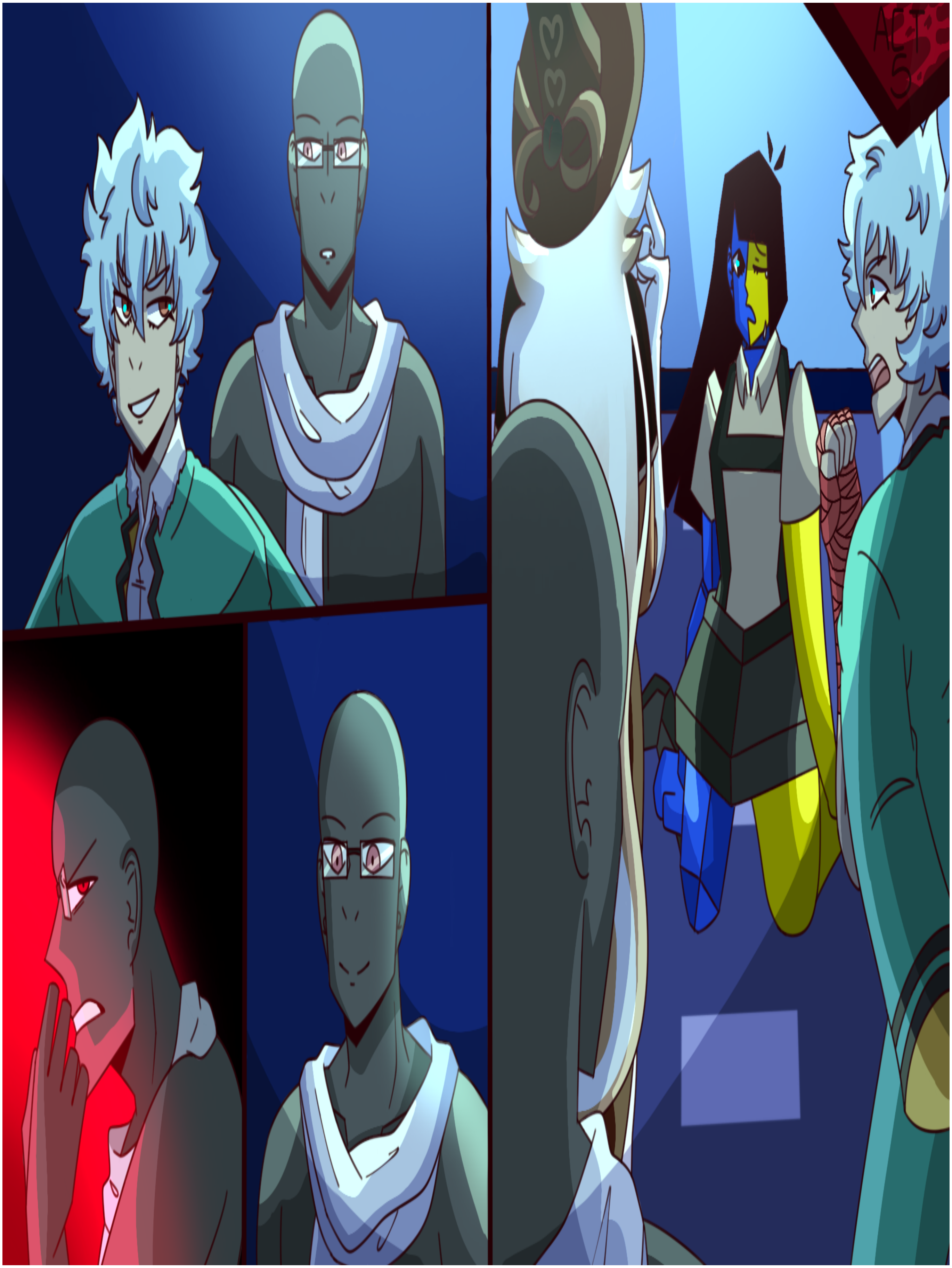
L: “In a mindset of defence, Walter ran over to the aluminium tool case and unlocked it with the key he always kept on him, and retrieved a hammer. In a panic of quick thinking to try and stop him from attacking back, the culprit picked up a large glass shard off of the sand and stabbed it into Walter’s neck, stunning him a second time. In an attempt to finish him off, the culprit then pushed Walter into the boat’s fire.”



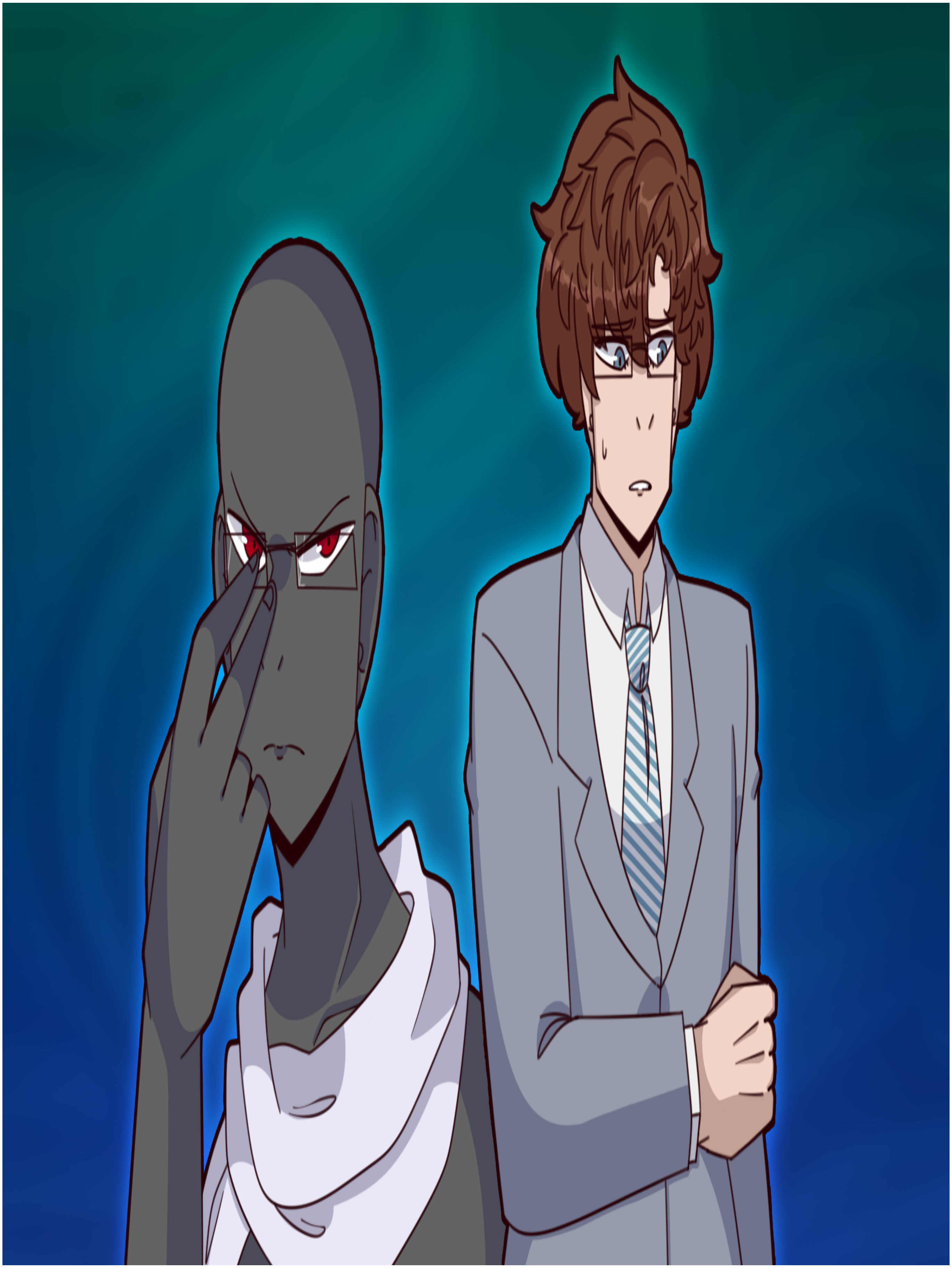
L: “However, only Walter’s left arm was caught ablaze. In a last-ditch effort to put himself out, Walter ran into the ocean. However, this would be his final mistake, and a very fortunate upper hand for the culprit. The culprit dunked his head underwater, drowning him. This is why the cause of death was left out of the Nesos File.”


ACT 4

L: “Walter’s body was then dragged to shore by the culprit, in order to let his soaked body dry so that any connection with the ocean in the morning of the body discovery would be overlooked. The culprit finally moved on to clearing the crime scene. First, they began to collect all large shards of glass into a plastic bag and threw it in the ocean, most likely in the hopes it would float away. They then placed the hammer back into Walter’s grip to make it appear as if he had successfully attacked the culprit at some point. As well as this, the culprit stole the note that they had written to Walter off of his person and threw it into the boat’s fire in order to remove the evidence of why Walter had gone to the beach in the first place.”


ACT 5

L: “After all of this, the killer left the scene, leaving the boat to burn itself out by morning. They arrived back at the sports centre just before midnight, in order to appear as if they were there the whole time. Thus, solidifying their false alibi that would protect them for the trial.”



Hayasaka: ("That's the mystery behind this case… The case only you could have orchestrated, *Hiroshi* .")

COMPLETE

L: “I believe that’s everything that needs to be said. Of course, you must’ve slipped the lighter back into Jesse’s pocket during the morning. And I do indeed believe you were at the restaurant, considering you were part of Jesse’s search party.”

Hiroshi: “...”

Hayasaka: (“It’s all… It’s all incredibly hard to believe. Even if all the evidence is there, even if I contributed my own points to it all, it’s hard to comprehend that someone like Hiroshi would murder Walter, let alone murder at all…”)

Kurumada: “Anythin’ you wanna say, kid?”

Hiroshi: “...While I don’t wish to stay stubborn and appear a fool, I… am confused why I feel frightened to say anything more.”

Yuri: “Perhaps that’s what guilt does to someone. I-It’s not as if you have any way to defend yourself anymore.”

Kaidou: “Then, Hiroshi really is the…?”

Jesse: “...”

Monotora: “...So? Is this god-awful silence permission to begin the voting now?”

Retsuko: “Well, if we have our killer, then…”

L: “There is nothing more that needs to be done.”

Monotora: “Thank fuckin’ god! Any longer and I’d just tear into ya one by one from boredom alone! Right then, cast your vote for who you think the blackened is in the newly added section of your tablets. I wonder if you’ll get it right…!!”

VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: END!

Monotora: “Now that all the results have been collected in, I can officially state that the vote is unanimous for Hiroshi! Ahaha, you bunch’a bastards are totally correct too! The blackened who hacked off Walter White was none other than ghostbuster boy!”

Hiroshi: “...”

Hayasaka forced himself to keep his gaze on Hiroshi, as turning away would only undermine all that happened to get to this point. He noticed how his team members – Kaidou, Latte and Ena – stared at him in betrayal and confusion, Kaidou the most so.

Kaidou: “No… I-It really was you, Hiroshi? But, I don’t understand…”

Jesse: “Oh, but you’re gonna fess exactly why you did it, y’hear? There’s nowhere to run now, you asshole!”

Bojack: “Jesus, calm down. You look like you’re about to jump him.”

Jesse: “I’m not–I ain’t gonna attack you. But I’m owed an explanation *immediately* .”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse…”)

Hiroshi remained silent for a moment more, before composing himself as he adjusted his lenses.

Hiroshi: “...I wouldn’t imagine that my case would be solved at first. I assumed I would be able to outsmart the majority – but even I have made mistakes like this in the past…”

Jesse: “That ain’t answerin’ the question, smart-ass.”

Hiroshi: “Then I’ll tell you exactly why I decided to commit murder.”

L: “That would be appreciated.”

Hiroshi: “...I won’t spare you filler: I made up my mind after receiving the letter the previous morning.”

Brian: “Y-You mean the motive…?”

Natsuki: “Seriously? I know I was mad about them, but we all agreed to ignore them!”

Latte: “And weren’t you the one to suggest we see our letters as a source of motivation to build the boat, Hiroshi?”

Hiroshi: “That was merely a lie to remain under the radar.”

Ena: “Lies drenched within more lies!”

Kurumada: “What the hell was even in your letter that pushed you over the edge to commit murder for god’s sake?”

Hiroshi: “My letter was addressed to me by my close friend, Takuro. Within the letter, he explained that something unfathomable had happened upon my time on this island.”

Retsuko: “What was it?”

Hiroshi: “The Oni had escaped the mansion and fled into our village, terrorising the town and murdering the townfolk.”

Yuri: “T-That’s…!”

Hiroshi: “After reading the letter, I was outraged, knowing I accepted to join the company on behalf of aiding my methods in capturing the Oni, only to discover something so heinous had happened while I was kidnapped.”

Mai: “Is that why you decided to kill Walter…?”

Hiroshi: “...I desperately needed to leave this island, to save my friends and family, to see if they were alright. But, it wasn’t just that alone. If the Oni really had struck the village, who was to stop it from furthering their rampage to other places, causing a wide-spread murder spree? It was something only I could stop, as I knew the ins and outs of the Oni alone.”

Kaidou: “I-I mean, that’s a big deal! If the Oni is that dangerous, then I understand why you’d want to save everyone!”

Latte: “If I were in your shoes, Hiroshi, I surely would’ve felt compelled to do the same…”

Retsuko: You really didn’t have a choice, did you? Especially if it was a threat to so many lives…”

Jesse: “What? And leave us to all die for it?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, did you have any consideration for us?”

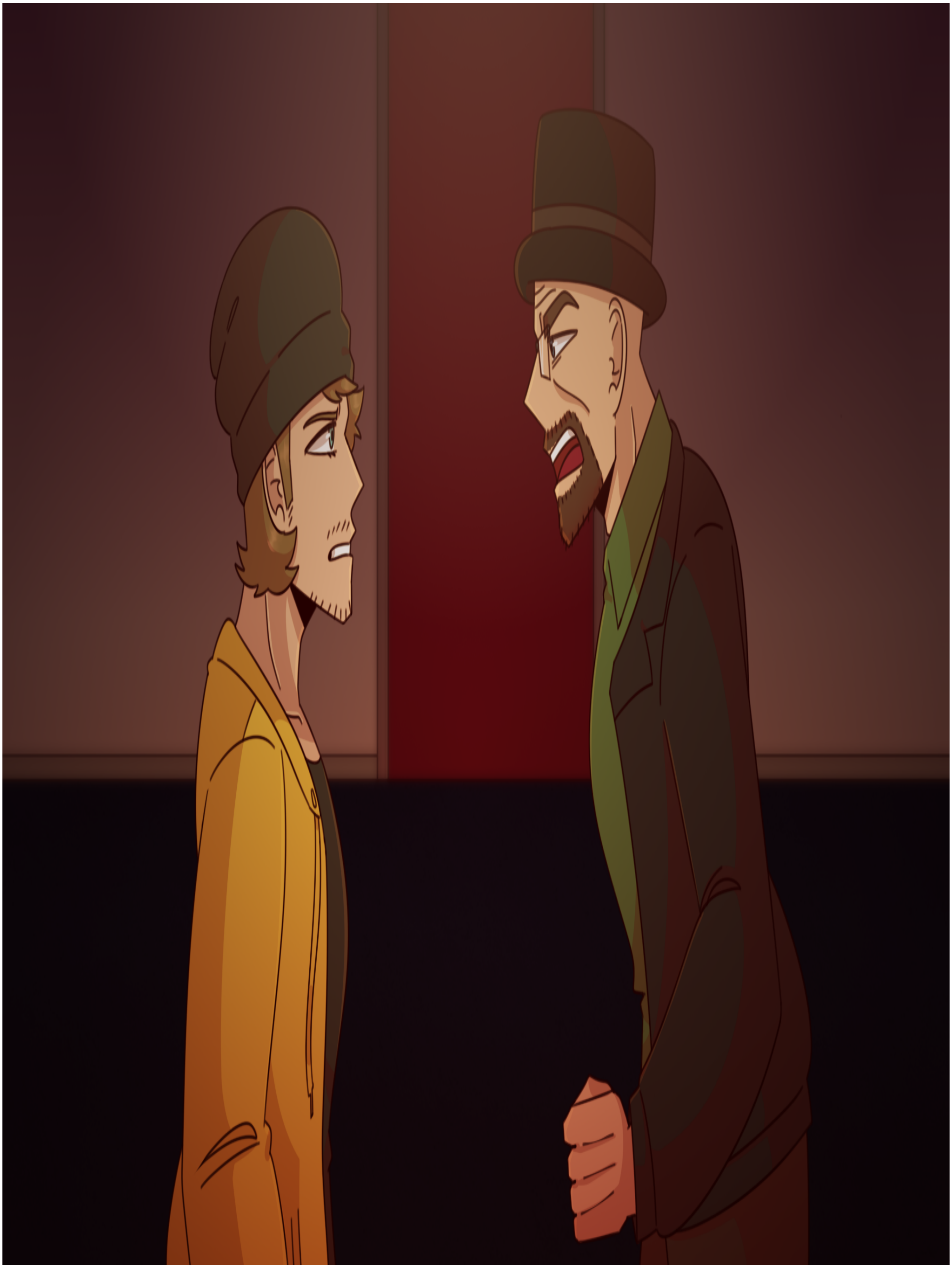
Kurumada: “Killin’ someone would’ve been pointless, anyway! We were all gonna escape on the boat today if you hadn’t burnt the damn thing and ruined your only chance!”

Hiroshi: “The boat… Oh, if only you knew. *That was an impossible feat from the start.* ”

Hayasaka: “W-What do you mean by that…?”

Hiroshi: “Yesterday, while I was walking to the sports centre to train with Kaidou, Latte and Ena, I overheard Walter pull Jesse to one side as the boat team left the hotel for the beach.”

FLASHBACK



Walter: “Jesse.”

Jesse: “What? You just told us to go to the beach and all that, so…”

Walter: “No, Jesse. I need to talk to you about something.”

Jesse: “Uh, what?”

Walter: “Over here—!”

Jesse: “Alright, alright! What is it, Mr. White?”

Walter: “You need to keep everyone on task for as long as possible. I fear the group’s resolve won’t last much longer.”

Jesse: “What the hell are you talking about?”

Walter: “The boat Jesse! Focus! Sooner or later, a good majority of them are going to strike out of it for real.”

Jesse: “Well, I mean since the letters n’ all, I understand where they’re coming from… Like who did you even get your letter from? Skyler, right?”

Walter: “That detail doesn’t matter, Jesse, just listen to me. Please tell me you realise what’ll happen if we have no boat.”

Jesse: “Surely there’s some other way to escape, isn’t there?”

Walter: “No Jesse! This is our only ticket out of here… emphasis on *our* .”

Jesse: “Wh...What? What’re you talking about, Mr. White?”

Walter: “Do you know why I haven’t shown anyone else the blueprints? It’s because I’m sure at least a few of them would catch on that the boat would only ever be able to carry two people at most.”

Jesse: “Wait what?! Are you serious?”

Walter: “Jesse! Keep it down for God’s sake— *cough, hack* !!”

Jesse: “Yo, Mr. White! Are you okay?”

Walter: “ *cough* ...I’m fine, Jesse… It’s just the cough, remember?.”

Jesse: “Argh… So like, why? Why only build a boat big enough for two and not, I dunno, all sixteen of us?”

Walter: “Because it’s impossible. Plain and simple.”

Jesse: “What?”

Walter: “There’s hardly enough resources on this island alone to build a big enough boat, and besides, do you know how long that’d take? Imagine we had tried to build it, then what would happen when people start striking out when the boat was only part way complete?”

Jesse: “I...I guess you have a point there, but… what’re we gonna do with *this* boat then?”

Walter: “Connect the dots for once, Jesse: *we’re* going to ride it home.”

Jesse: “Wait, what? And what about the others? They’re never gonna let us get onto the *water* , Mr. White.”

Walter: “That’s why I plan to convince everyone to let us leave and look for help.”

Jesse: “Yeah, I’m sure that’ll go down well.”

Walter: “It *would’ve* , if this goddamn letter didn’t ruin everything. Just–look, you need to keep everyone on your side for as long as possible. As long as people trust *you* , then we should be able to pull it off.”

Jesse: “...Are you sure? I mean, some of these people are kinda cool. I dunno if I wanna leave some of ‘em behind…”

Walter: “Jesse, we don’t have a choice. We *need* to go back. We *need* to keep selling what we’ve cooked. I *need* to make the money for my family.”

Jesse: “I get it, yo. You got responsibilities… but don’t they as well?”

Walter: “Think about who’s more important here. Us or them. You hardly know them, Jesse. Once we’re gone, you’ll forget about them easily. Sacrifices have to be made whether you like them or not.”

Jesse: “...Fine.”

Walter: “Good. Good. Just focus on getting this boat complete for tomorrow.”

Jesse: “Whatever, yo…”

FLASHBACK END

Hiroshi: “All along, Walter had always intended for the boat only be able to carry two people at most, while the rest of us were merely lied to become slaves to his plan. I then realised how selfish Walter truly was, even using Jesse to an extent to keep up his appearance. I was already in mind to kill someone, but Walter right then had solidified himself as my target, to prevent his plan from taking any action. This is what I threatened him over in the note: something he clearly didn’t want everyone to find out about.”

Brian: That’s… T-There’s no way that’s the truth, is it?”

Kurumada: “Are you tellin’ us that Walter had planned that from the start?!”

Bojack: “What an asshole. Well, thank god I didn’t lift a finger for that boat.”

Retsuko: “But I did… I trusted him ever since he became the leader because I thought he was being genuine. To find out I did all of that to only benefit him is… I-It makes me so mad!”

Hayasaka: (“I even remember mentioning how the boat looked a little small in my opinion. But, I didn’t think this was the reason. I… I can’t believe Walter had used us.”)

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “Hey, how long had *you* known about that?”

Jesse: “I–Don’t turn this around on me! I only found out durin’ that talk with Mr. White, alright?! It’s not as if I agreed to it ‘cuz I wanted to! I was always hesitant to go through with the plan the next mornin’, y’know…? And, hey, even if Mr. White was a selfish asshole, that still doesn’t mean he deserved to *die* for it!”

Hiroshi: “Don’t you understand? It was with either one of you sacrificing yourselves or the lives of many more people who are currently in danger from the Oni.”

Jesse: “Wha–?! Mr. White had *no* fuckin’ say in that fact, bastard! You’re just as selfish for killin’ him so brutally with no remorse!”

Bojack: “Calm it, for god’s sake. You’re just getting on my nerves now.”

L: “I see… And so, that conversation is how you managed to find out about Walter’s cough.”

Hiroshi: “Yes, that is how I came up with the plan to use his cough against him. I had overheard an off-hand conversation where Jesse mentioned he had a lighter on his person a few days prior, and so I decided to steal it when he wasn’t aware, and dropped it back into his pocket in the morning at the restaurant.”

L: “Just as I proposed…”

Hiroshi: “My intention, as you figured, was to frame Jesse for the crime. It was only in the hopes that everyone would get the vote wrong – not for ill intent.”

Jesse: “Gee, how considerate of you, *asshole* .”

Hiroshi: “...”

Yuri: “U-Um, there’s something that’s been bugging me. Why did you use your scarf to strangle him instead of something more conventional?”

Hiroshi: “You see, due to my past experience, I’ve been in situations where I’ve had to use less conventional items to solve problems. I assumed doing the same here would cover my crime more due to the simplicity of hiding my scarf in plain sight. Of course, the lack of a strangulation tool at the scene had proved suspicious, and if I only had more time to collect rope from the supermarket– ah, but then again, the fact there would be no tear marks from said strangulation would be telling as well…”

Jesse: “Cut the crap on the intelligent shit, would you?”

Hiroshi: “I apologise…”

Hayasaka: ("...That's everything, huh? Why Hiroshi did it, why he killed Walter… This is just too surreal to take in. Am I just supposed to accept it for what it is?")

Monotora: "What a poor little sob story for you all, eh? *High* senberg wasn't all that dependable as he made himself out to be… But what the hell did you expect?! It's a dog eat dog world here – this isn't like your lives back home! If you want to survive, the best thing to do is to prey on others, kehe."

Mai: "How could you even say such a thing?"

Monotora: "Because I don't have to deal with those – what's the word – emotions? Ah, what the hell! I got unfortunate news for ya anyway, Hiroshi!"

Hiroshi: "Pardon me? I demand you tell me what it is."

Monotora: "Heh… Heheh… Ahahaha! Ya wanna know what's real funny? A right old femur tickler, even? All your pathetic little efforts have been for nothing – nothing at all! Do you want to know who let the Oni free in the first place? Well look no further than Nesos themselves! They were the ones responsible for letting the Oni rampage in your village, and have all the power to capture it back up too! On top of *that* , there's no need to worry yourself over the safety of your 'fwiends and famiwy' 'cuz that blue bastard mauled everyone before we snatched it up again! Such a shame, hm?"

Kaidou: "W-What?!"

Hayasaka: ("How could Nesos have the power to do such a thing…?")

Hiroshi: " *Impossible…* That's impossible! No… You're lying…!"

Monotora: "It ain't no lie, ghostbuster boy! It doesn't matter what you believe in the end, as you'll never be able to go home and see for yourself."

Latte: “And why is that…?”

Monotora: “You haven’t forgotten, have ya? Your punishment awaits you, kehehe!”

L: “Yes, the punishment…”

Brian: “Um, what exactly was this ‘punishment’ again?”

Monotora: “Really?! It’s an *execution* made specifically for Hiroshi to enjoy until his final breaths! Ahaha! How stupid you are, Brian, for asking such a pathetic question! Perhaps I should punish you as well, just because? Hehe!”

Brian: “H-Huh?! N-No–please don’t!”

Retsuko: “So… Hiroshi’s really going to die…?”

Yuri: “Oh please no! N-Not another death so soon!”

Kurumada: “Do ya sickos really have to go through with this?!”

Hiroshi: “...”

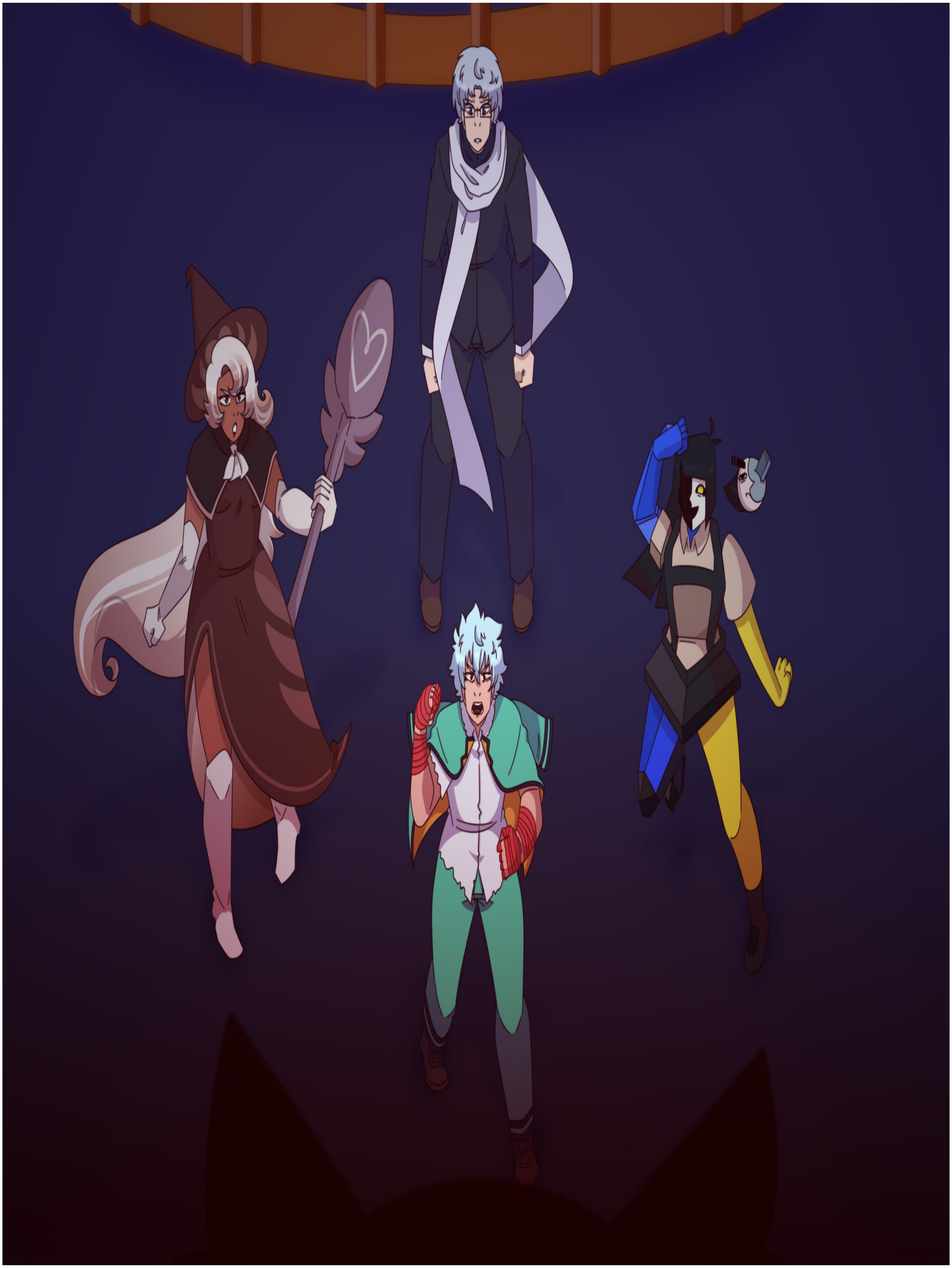
Hayasaka: (“If Hiroshi is going to be executed then… I-I can’t tell how he feels. I’m unable to read his face at all – is he feeling fear? Remorse? Surely someone so young must be afraid for his life, right?”)

Monotora: “Ahaha! S’pose we should just get onto the main event then, eh?”

Kaidou: “Hold it right there!!”

Monotora: “... *Huh* ?”

In the next moment, Kaidou, Latte and Ena had sprung in formation between Hiroshi and Monotora, eyes full of determined courage to protect their friend.



Latte: “You’ll have to get through us first if you wish to hurt Hiroshi!”

Ena: “Heheh… Everything is so slow… Come, try to attack me! You will not land a hit!”

Hiroshi: “Huh? What’re you all…?”

Monotora: “Oh, ho, ho! Things are really startin’ to spice up now…!”

Kaidou: “Even if I’m scared, I want to defend Hiroshi to the very end using everything I’ve got! He doesn’t deserve to die – he was tricked by you into killing in the first place!”

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “Exactly! It’s Nesos’ fault he’s in this situation! You lied to him, and made him believe he had no other choice!”

Mai: “Latte…”

Jesse: “What the hell are you doing?! Why’re you defending a *murderer* for fuck’s sake?!”

Ena: “To kill, or be killed… Everything you say is so unfair! We shall not stand for such a thing…!”

Kaidou: “So, go on! Try and hurt us! But we won’t ever let you lay a scratch on Hiro–”

Hiroshi: “ *Stop this at once* !”

Kaidou: “H-Huh? Hiroshi…?”

Ena: “Why has the boy we must protect stopped us?”

Hiroshi: “What you’re attempting to do – it’s futile. I will die no matter what you try and pull on Monotora.”

Latte: “But Hiroshi, don’t you see? This isn’t your fault; you don’t deserve to die!”

Hiroshi: “I myself made the conscious decision to kill. Yes, perhaps Nesos provided me with a motive, but I was the one to kill Walter in the end. I could have stopped at any time during my plan – I had even contemplated the validity of the letters at one stage.”

L: “So even you couldn’t fight the sneaking suspicion that they could’ve been faked…”

Hiroshi: “Do you want to know what exactly I told Moony in the sports centre the previous night? I revealed to her that our distraction plan was to ‘sacrifice ourselves to Monotora the next morning’.”

Moony: “Do you understand why I was mad now? Your plan was ridiculous!”

Kaidou: “But that–that wasn’t our plan! Hiroshi, why did you say that…?”

Hiroshi: “While it was mainly to rile her up to cause a distraction, it was essentially the same as what we had initially planned to do: going up against someone like Monotora would be synonymous to a sacrifice.”

The three were left unresponsive, all previous eagerness drained to nothing but an vacant, dejected look.

Hiroshi: “...I apologise for what I have done, for deceiving you all and invalidating our trust. However, I would rather you three not get hurt in exchange for my own life. If you’re still willing to listen, I only have one final request. Once you escape the island, locate my village, and see if Monotora had truly lied about the death of my friends. If not, please tell them to carry on my legacy of my research on the Oni. I do not wish for my work to have gone to waste.”

Kaidou: “Hiroshi… I-I’ll definitely do it for you…!”

Latte: “If that’s what you want, then we’ll respect your wishes…”

Hiroshi nodded, and then turned to Jesse, who only offered him a distant glare in return.

Hiroshi: “I know you have no right to forgive me for what I have done, Jesse. In spite of that, I deeply apologise for how things have turned out in the end.”

Jesse: “...”

Jesse remained silent. Hayasaka watched as he sharply turned his body away from Hiroshi.

Monotora: “...Is this permission to start the execution now? There’s no more filler to be said, yeah?”

Hiroshi nodded, pursing his lips.

Monotora: “Ahaha! Great stuff! My blood’s really rushin’ now! So then, we’ve prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Paranormal Investigator, Hiroshi!”

Hiroshi: “...I’m trembling. I… I don’t understand why… I believe I am scared? But, I wasn’t before. Perhaps… all creatures are inevitably afraid of death.”

Monotora: “Time to play with my prey! IT'S PUNISHMENT TIME!!”

Hiroshi: “ *No…I don’t want this.* ”

PUNISHMENT TIME! [VIDEO]

Monotora: “Bahahaha!! Did ya–did ya see that?! That dumb bastard didn’t even see me comin’! What an idiot for even thinkin’ he could’ve lived!”

Hayasaka: (“T-That… *That was* … He’s gone… Dead? Ripped to shreds… T-This is, h-haha, *insanity* .”)

Mai: “No… N-No…”

Natsuki: “What the… W-What the hell did you do to him?! You can’t be serious, can you?!”

Retsuko: “T-That’s just so… *horrible* .”

Bojack: “You’re screwed up in the head.”

Monotora: “Who cares what you guys think? Hey, Jesse, are ya happy now that Walter’s killer is dead? Hehehe!”

Jesse stared on unresponsive. His eyes were wide, unsure hands gripped tightly on the hem of his hoodie.

Jesse: “I… I didn’t know he was gonna die like that…”

Kurumada: “What the fuck even was that?!”

Monotora: “That’s what an execution is, y’hear! Just as a heads up to any future killers, your murders gotta be better than Hiroshi’s if you wish to survive…!”

Kaidou: “N-No! A murder will never– *hic* –happen ever again! No one’s gonna kill anyone else from now on!!”

Monotora: “Heh… *sure* .”

Without sparing another word, Monotora leaped off their throne and left the group to suffer in their shock alone.

Latte: “Kaidou, dear, everything’s going to be okay, alright? I don’t want you to hurt your voice…”

Kaidou shakily nodded but continued to sob softly, holding onto Saiki’s arm. Saiki remained still despite his blank face, allowing Kaidou to spill his grief into his shoulder. It wasn’t only him, although, as Ena had begun to bawl with a dark face, limbs slumping down towards the floor.

Ena: “Not fair… This death game is not fair!!”

Bojack: “Hey, uh, Jesse. You alright…?”

Jesse’s gaze trailed to the floor, and he shrugged.

Jesse: “I… I dunno. I thought I’d be somewhat happy after seein’ Mr. White’s killer die, but, I just feel… numb.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Hayasaka felt his heart beat rapidly in his chest, as if it were to lunge out of him at any moment. It was nauseating – he just wanted it to cease already. But there was no chance he was to forget exactly what he witnessed that day, and it only made him more light headed. The way Hiroshi ran for his life, the way he was cornered so suddenly at the end, the way those *monsters* had… cleaned him off like a fly on the wall. Hayasaka held back a choked noise at the image surfacing in his mind once more. It was disgusting, cruel, horrible. And yet they were forced to watch every second of it.

Hayasaka was jolted out of his paralysed state at a hand planting itself softly on his shoulder, and he glanced up to see who it was.

Kurumada: “...You okay, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “I-I–Um, yes–well, n-no, but–...I just wish things didn’t have to happen like this… I feel as if I have a part in convicting Hiroshi to his death…”

Kurumada: “Hey, none of that was your fault, y’hear? You did what you had to do in the trial.”

Mai: “I suppose we’re all responsible for his death by voting for him…”

L: “I wouldn’t look at it that way. Hiroshi said himself that it entirely in his conscious decision to commit murder, and on top of that, we were forced to vote for him or else we would’ve died.”

Natsuki: “God, insensitive much?”

L: “Nesos made it very clear it was us or him, otherwise we all would’ve suffered the same fate as Hiroshi. Are you saying that is what you wanted instead…?”

Natsuki: “N-No, but…”

Natsuki faltered, crossing her arms tightly and darting her eyes to the ground.

Kaidou: “I–I wanna go back! Please, can we leave now? I-I don’t wanna be reminded of what happened… P-Please…”

Yuri: “I-I want to leave, too. I just want to go back to my room and forget about everything that happened…”

Retsuko: “...The elevator’s opened back up. W-We can go now if we want…”

Not another word had to be spoken. It was obvious what everyone wanted to do. Silently, they all filled onto the elevator to be taken back to the surface of their island prison. As Hayasaka trudged lethargically towards his hotel room, he was stopped by his friends.

Kurumada: “Look, are you sure you guys are alright? I mean, whatever the hell that execution was, it ain’t something we can easily forget…”

Mai: “I think we’ll be okay. However, I firmly believe we shouldn’t let it get to us too much, as what happened between Hiroshi and Walter – well, we’re not a part of it, are we? If anything, our goal is still to find a way to escape.”

Hayasaka: “I-I just don’t know if I can get over it so easily…”

Kurumada: “... *Damnit* . This damn company – I’ll get back at ‘em somehow, for both Walter and Hiroshi. Despite how selfish they were. It’s Nesos’ fault in the end.”

Hayasaka: (“How much blame can we put onto Nesos over those two, however…? I’m not saying I resent them, b-but…”)

Kurumada: “Nah, but what I’m most glad about, is that you two are still here. What’s most important to me is protectin’ you guys, y’know? Heh, c’mere.”

Wrapping his arms around Hayasaka and Mai, Kurumada pulled the two into a soft hug.

Mai: “Ah, Kurumada! You silly man…!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, haha…”

Kurumada: “What? I love ya guys, don’t forget that.”

Mai: “As do I, hehe…”

Hayasaka: (“At times like this, with Kurumada and Mai, I really do feel better. Even if everything looks bad, I know I can rely on them, right…?”)

The three remained in the bittersweet embrace for a moment more, cherishing the fluffy air around them.

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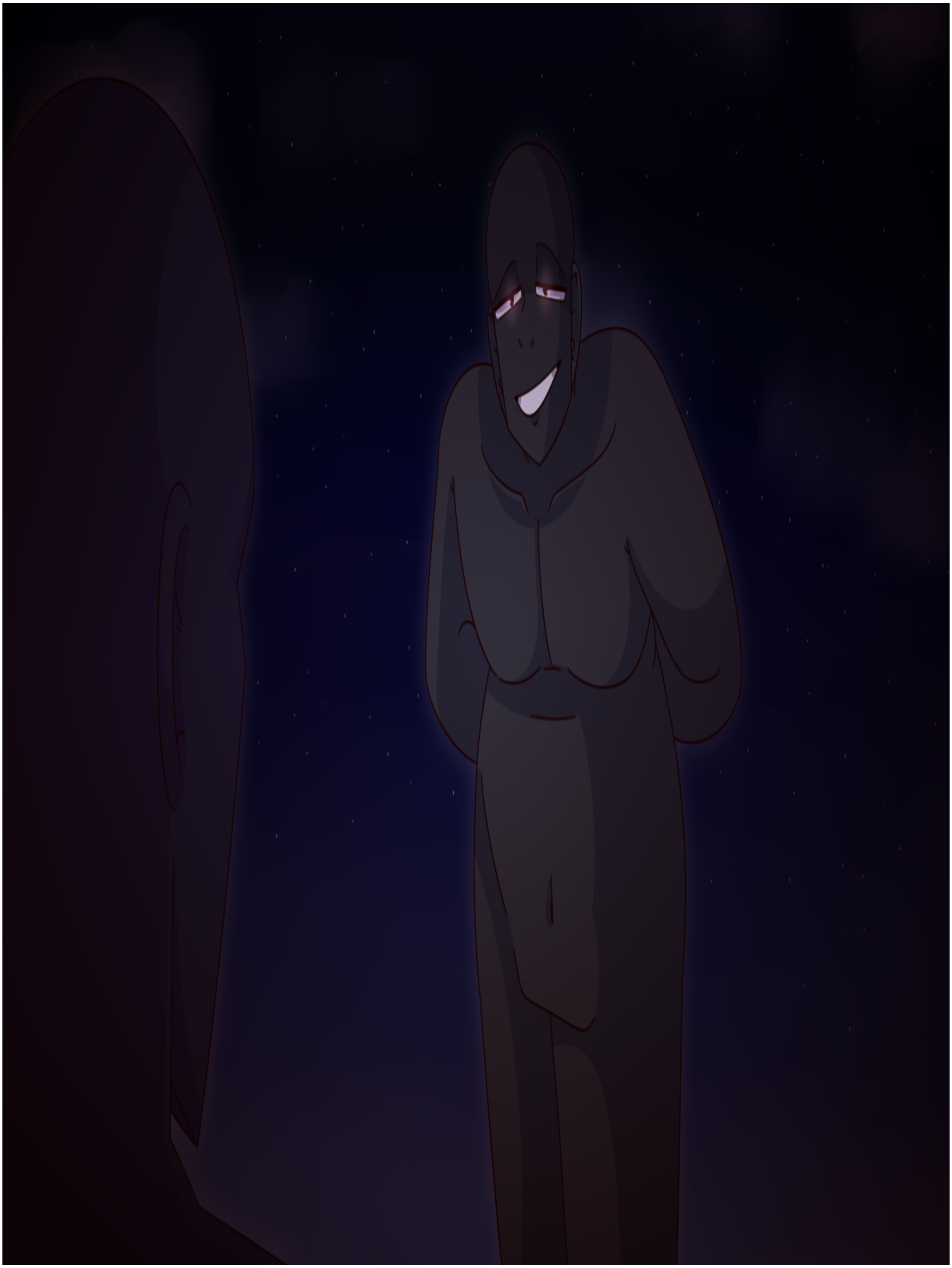


???#1: “...Do I make myself clear?”

???#2: “...”

???#1: “...I’m gonna need you to answer me, y’know. Especially since, well, I’m your boss now, heheh.”

???#2: “...Yes.”

???#1: “Yes, what?”

???#2: “Yes… *boss* .”

???#1: “Good. And you understand what you need to do? What your role, your jobs, and everything in between?”

???#2: “Yes, boss.”

???#1: “Don’t wear such an ugly frown. You and me, yeah, we’re going to make a good team. Don’t you agree? Heheh. Right then, we’ll part ways for now. Pretend this conversation never happened. If I need you, well, I’m sure a certain tiger will prompt you.”

???#2: “...”

CHAPTER 1

Blue Sky Sinking

14

Chapter End Notes

(emotional DAMAGE)

I was very surprised no one had guessed Hiroshi as the culprit really lol. I mean I really thought people were going to catch on about the account, but it was interesting to see what you all thought in your own perspectives regardless! I do wish he had more time, however he was the type to remain under the radar mind you, which probably helped him hide from you and the group haha

I hope you enjoyed the execution too! I had a lot of fun making it... hehe.

And as you can see, I've changed up some of the minigames from DR69. While removing the logic dive and hangman's gambit (I felt as if they were a bit filler-ish), I've added balance battles from YTTD to spice things up a bit! ;)

So then, before we part ways until chapter 2, I'm gonna need some reader input once again for the FTEs! Please vote for who you'd like to see for chapter 2's FTEs! The top 5 results will be shown next chapter. Also, each character will have 3 FTEs, so the characters shown this chapter (AKA Ena, Saiki, Brian and Latte) can be voted for again, OR, you could perhaps vote for some new characters!

LINK TO POLL: [CLOSED - sorry!]

Tyvm for reading! <3

Chapter 2: Sinning Swimming Dying Diving (Daily Life)

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone!
So, firstly, I am again very sorry for the wait for this chapter. We're both still very in love with this fic, so there's no worry of abandonment. Just motivation issues on some ends lol
Also, if anyone is going to post links to this fanfic elsewhere or make edits with the CGs or videos, then all I ask is that you credit both me (lennardd) and Kitsune Rexx for the art, because we're both putting our hand into this so it's nice to see proper credit is all <3
Other than that, enjoy this hella long daily life!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayasaka: "...Nn… *W-Wha* …?"

Hayasaka blinked open one eye. He shielded the top of his forehead with the back of his palm as he attempted to adjust to the brightness of the place he had awoken in. Fortunately for him it wasn't that light at all. Behind him, the endless sky gleamed with brilliant yellows and purples, and yet the further he looked straight ahead, the more trees appeared, multiplying in rapid numbers to the point where the far end teetered on pitch black.

Hayasaka: ("H-Hang on, *trees* ? But I was in my hotel room, wasn't I? Where did I…?")

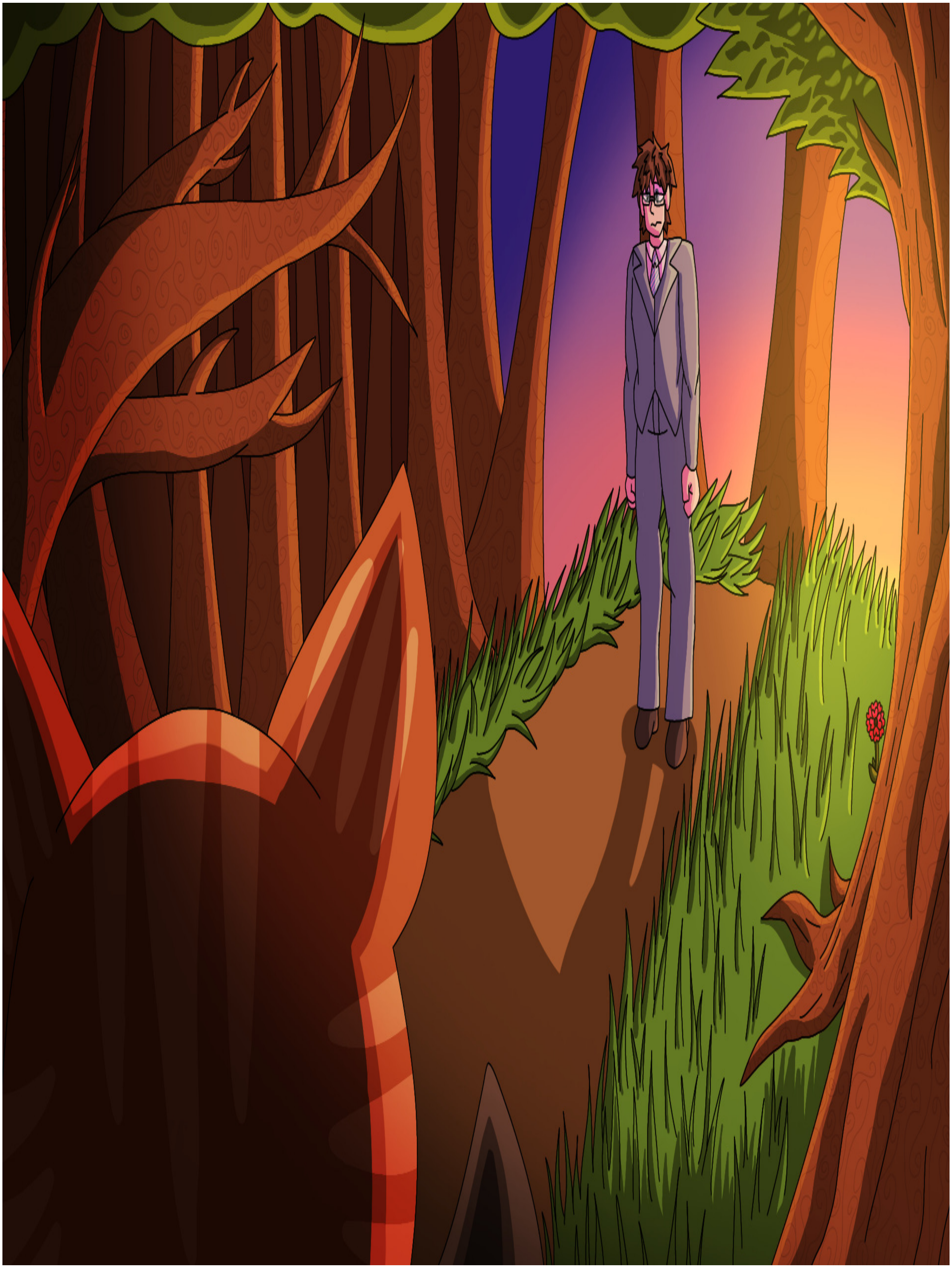
As he peered down, Hayasaka discovered he was standing fully up – his natural stiff slouch still very much grounded in his posture. He then discerned he was standing on the ground: not the rough red carpet of his hotel room, but dry, mossy dirt. His heel slid back a little in surprise, but he managed to keep himself upright.

Hayasaka: ("Surely this isn't right… W-What's going on…?")

???: "Suit-n'-specs!"

Hayasaka gasped as a wave of alleviation washed over his body. He shot his eyes up to the dim path in front of him, focusing on a figure a good few feet away. A *small* figure at that. One with lop-sided animal ears and big glove paws gripping onto a peachy-toned plush cat.

Hayasaka: “G-Gin…!”



Fragments of an uncertain smile forced Hayasaka's lips to upturn, and his body began to move in an subconscious attempt to bridge the gap between him and the boy. Each step forward pertained one less tense muscle that ached his body.

That was, until he hit something that wasn't quite ground.

It made a sharp squelching noise as his smile faltered back into a lost frown. Glancing down, Hayasaka felt his body lock up at the sight: a corpse – not one, but two. A man and a woman. Faces unable to be recognised, and yet somehow familiar.

Hayasaka: ("W-Who… Who are…? No–no these couldn't be. They can't be *Gin's parents* , could they…? How did I not see them here before? Why isn't Gin saying anything about it? Gin, these are your parents! Why aren't you… Gin…")

As Hayasaka looked back up, a choked noise escaped his lips as a metallic yellow shine flickered behind the boy. The glimmer approached closer, the rough mechanical footsteps charging louder and louder until they filled his ears with dread.

Hayasaka: "Gin, move!"

But Gin didn't respond. His eyes were vacant, and there was no telling what was behind the mask – something Hayasaka believed he could always figure out. The creature seemed to have picked up speed, and Hayasaka felt as if the gap between him and Gin had distanced more than he realised. Even if he tried to run, it felt as if he was going nowhere at all.

Hayasaka: "Gin! Gin, listen to me! Move! Run! W-Why aren't you doing anything?!"

The animal pounced into the air with all its might, swinging their claws up in a janky, stilted jolt.

Hayasaka: "GIN–!!"

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Hayasaka: “A-AH–!”

Hayasaka’s head practically smashed against the headboard when a loud knocking snapped him into reality. He groaned softly, hands enveloping his head as he curled up between his knees, attempting to soothe himself of the throbbing of his head and the ringing in his ears. He had been awoken so jarringly that he felt as if he hadn’t slept at all. He sucked in a breath through gritted teeth, lifting his head up slightly.

A second round of knocking had startled him again, finally pushing himself out of bed and scrambling around his room to get ready. He popped the final button of his blazer hazily through the slit as he quickly tangled with his key and threw open the door.

Hayasaka: “I’m–I’m sorry for taking so long, please forgive me for my tardiness…!”

Kurumada: “Whoa, whoa… No need to spout some company apology at me.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “...Are you alright? You look a little… uh, spooked. Did I catch ya at a bad time?”

Hayasaka: “No, no, I… I was in the middle of getting dressed, I suppose.”

Kurumada: “Oh, uh, alright. That’s alright. S’uh, did ya get enough sleep?”

Hayasaka: “...Yes.” (“Or is that just a lie? Considering what happened the previous day…”)

Kurumada: “That’s good to hear. Well, I just swung by to ask if I could walk ya to the restaurant. Y’know, I didn’t wanna leave you alone, only ‘cuz of yesterday. I could even grab you a coffee if you’d like.”

Hayasaka: “That’s… T-Thank you, I appreciate it. Ah, but don’t worry about the coffee part – I’m alright with making it myself.” (“But I do admit I feel a lot safer walking with him than alone right now…”)

Rubbing his wrists, Hayasaka walked alongside Kurumada downstairs to the restaurant. Brief flashes of his dream passed by in his mind, but he attempted to push them down. He was relieved it was only a dream, relieved Gin was not in any real danger, but he wanted to take the thought no further. Arriving, Hayasaka almost paused at the doorway, noticing a fair few amount of people inside as per usual. It was a silly thought, really, as he and Kurumada were just the same as them, and yet it felt off for the group to appear as if nothing had ever happened, no one had ever died.

One quick unsuccessful scan for Walter or Hiroshi would prove opposite, of course.

He followed Kurumada into the kitchen, seeing Mai baking away, although with less vigour than usual. They all greeted one another a short good morning while Hayasaka approached the coffee machine.

Kurumada: “Shit… are we all just gonna continue on like nothing ever happened or somethin’?”

Mai: “It’s not like we can coop ourselves up in our rooms, can we now? That won’t do us any good.”

Kurumada: “I guess you’re right there…”

Silence remained beyond this point until Hayasaka picked up his scalding hot coffee, Kurumada taking initiative to lead them both back into the restaurant. Among the people who were present already, Hayasaka could tell none of them were feeling at ease, and more so there out of a outweigh from staying inside their rooms.

Kurumada: “D’ya think they’re here for the ‘morning meeting’ or whatever? We shouldn’t be sticking to his rules after he’s dead, damnit…”

Hayasaka: “I don’t necessarily think it’s because of that. No, since it’s become routine at this point, it’s probably more of a subconscious thing to continue to do rather than following orders. I-Isn’t that why you offered to come here with me?”

Kurumada: “...You explained it better than I ever could.”

Kurumada pulled a heavy hand through his hair as Hayasaka stole a soft sip of his coffee. They watched the remaining group members trickle in, even the late-comers a few minutes later. The last of the bunch scanned his jaded eyes around the restaurant, rendering him with a furrowed brow.

Bojack: “I’m surprised Jesse isn’t around. He always arrived here before me.”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse… The last time I saw him is when we all split up after the trial.”)

Retsuko: “He’s most likely grieving in his room right now. Especially after Walter’s death… Did you not realise that?”

Bojack: “Oh. I mean, I did know he was upset about Walter and all – I’m not an idiot – but… Eh, I dunno. Thought he would’ve at least come down to eat.”

Retsuko: “Then why don’t you go check on him? I’m sure he’d appreciate it. If I were in his position, what I’d really need at this time is someone willing to snap me out of it.”

Bojack: “Does it have to be me specifically, or…? You know, since I’m not very good at that. Checking up on people, I mean. I don’t want to put him in a worse mood.”

Retsuko: “But you helped him out yesterday, didn’t you? If you find it awkward going alone, I can come with you. Anyway, he should probably come down to listen to the morning meeting.”

Bojack: “I’m not–...fine. Just, make it quick. I’m hungry.”

Retsuko tilted her head for a moment, but shook it off and she and Bojack left the restaurant.

Hayasaka: ("I'm unsure why Bojack is so adamant in dodging Jesse, but… I know it's none of my business.")

Kurumada: "Not much of a morning meetin' anymore. Ain't no one to lead the discussion, considerin', well, y'know…"

Ena: "But what are we to do now to escape the island, my friends?"

Brian: "Um, h-how about the boat? That was our original plan, wasn't it?"

Kurumada: "Yeah, alright. So did ya forget it was destroyed or something?"

Natsuki: "And don't expect us to try and rebuild it. I don't have the mental strength to commit to something so big again."

Yuri: "Especially since Walter was the only one who knew what he was doing, I just don't know if it's possible again…"

Brian: "A-Ah…"

L: "Well then, perhaps I should propose my idea. It's about time we all directed ourselves away from trying to find possibilities to escape the island, and focus on cracking the identity of the Nesos Company."

Natsuki: "Did you not hear what I just said? I can't do *anything* right now. That sounds even more draining than the boat."

Ena: "I feel all wobbly and soggy from our endeavours past the previous moon rise. My brain cannot think at all!"

Moony: "Jeeze, should I hang you out to dry or something?"

L: “What a shame…”

Kaidou: “...”

Latte: “Ah, Kaidou dear. You’re not usually this quiet. Is everything alright?”

Kaidou slightly jumped, lifting his head up from where he was previously staring hard into the ceramic tiles with a blank expression.

Kaidou: “I–I’m fine. It’s just… *sniff*, no, I can’t do it. I still can’t stop thinking about it. Hiroshi’s execution. Hiroshi’s death… I’m sorry – I only knew him for a few days, a-and yet…”

Latte: “Oh, you poor dear. Come here…”

Latte moved over to Kaidou, taking him into a light embrace.

Latte: “It’s alright to feel this way, Kaidou. Perfectly normal, even. You see, grief can affect people in different ways. Some people can get over things like death rather quickly, and some take more time than others.”

Kaidou: “But, why am I the only one? Why am I being so weak over this…?”

Latte: “What you may think is weakness, is actually a sign of strength. The fact that you came down here despite your feelings is so brave of you, and I bet Hiroshi would be proud to see you continue on, don’t you agree?”

Kaidou: “...He would?”

Latte nodded with a smile that could melt chocolate. Kaidou remained quiet for a moment, before sprouting up out of her hold with a determined fist.

Kaidou: “Ah! Thank you, Miss Latte!”

Latte: “ *Miss* Latte? Aw, you’re so sweet!”

Saiki: “ *I’m relieved it didn’t take long for him to get back to his usual self* .”

Latte: “Saiki, you should be more aware of Kaidous’ feelings. He is your friend after all.”

Kaidou: “Oh no, don’t worry about Saiki. He’s always been like this – but just with Saiki being by my side makes me feel a lot better. In fact, Saiki was the one to wake me up and walk me to the restaurant today!”

Latte: “Ah, I see. That’s very nice of you to do so!”

Saiki: “...”

Retsuko: “We’re back…!"

Hayasaka turned to see Retsuko and Bojack return at the front of the restaurant, alongside Jesse slowly in tow. Narrowing his eyes, he could make out how dishevelled and numb he appeared: his clothes seemed to be thrown on almost haphazardly, and his eyes appeared dull and dark. It was almost as if the light blue spark in his eyes had been blown out. Hayasaka’s nails tapped anxiously on his coffee cup as he heard someone else walk out into the restaurant behind him.

Mai: “Oh, Jesse! How’re you feeling? I didn’t expect to see you down here so soon.”

Jesse neglected to respond, eyes drifting down to the floor as he twisted the heel of his sneaker into the tiles with a soft squeak.

Hayasaka: ("Jesse… He never had the proper time to grieve for Walter at all, did he? Not during the investigation, nor at the trial. On top of the execution, it must've been hell for him. God, I can only imagine…")

Jesse: "...I…I don't wanna talk about what happened, alright? Just, it's whatever, yo. Let's leave it at that."

Mai: "I see. We'll respect your wishes…"

The group nodded in unison. Jesse tilted his head away from the crowd of eyes, nodding solemnly.

Bojack: "...So, what're we doing now?"

Before anyone could answer however, a nasally chuckle grinded Hayasaka's ears as a familiar mechanical creature hopped into the restaurant. He felt himself take a step back despite how far away he was from the tiger.

Monotora: "Oh, ho, ho! What a pity party you all are in!"

Natsuki: "W-What the hell?! What are *they* doing here?"

Kurumada: "Get lost, asshole! You ain't supposed to be in here!"

Hayasaka: ("Kurumada's right… The rules state Monotora can't enter buildings. S-So why is…")

Monotora: "Aw, looks like we have a couple'a detectives around here! One trial and you all think you're damn geniuses! Just kiddin', kaha! Y'see, I'm only inside here for a special reason…"

Yuri: "H-Huh? What is it?"

Monotora: “I bet you’re all familiar with that giant bridge on the other side of the island, yeah? Well, I’ve come to announce that Nesos has opened the gate, allowing you all access to the second island and its facilities!”

L: “Ah… I see my initial suspicions were correct. That if a murder were to be committed, and the spotless were to run a successful trial, we would be granted access over the bridge.”

Monotora: “If you asked me, I wouldn’t even think about doin’ this – I’d rather let you’se all get so bored here that you’ll start tearin’ at each other for entertainment. ‘Course, it’s Nesos’ reward to you after all.”

Retsuko: “Um, what’s on this new island? It’s not dangerous, is it?”

Monotora: “Any more dangerous than me? I’d doubt that, kehe! It’s up to you to find out what’s there – I’m not here to baby you lot. Even if I had litter, I’d probably just eat ‘em, ahaha!”

Much to Hayasaka’s relief, Monotora promptly pounced off, the grip on his coffee mug loosening to a comfortable degree.

Hayasaka: (“The fact that Monotora *can* come into buildings on certain occasions leaves me… Well, uncertain if I’ll ever feel safe anywhere again, h-haha…”)

Brian: “So, um, do we… do we go?”

L: “It would be most beneficial to investigate more into what Nesos has presently provided us with.”

Natsuki: “But it’s like Retsuko said – what happens *if* it’s dangerous?”

Bojack: “If it’s too far of a walk then I think I’m alright just staying here. I don’t think you realise I haven’t had the time to eat yet.”

Kurumada: “And what? Are we gonna sit around and do nothing?”

Latte: “Okay, well, let’s look at it like this: despite our complaints, we need to prove to ourselves how determined we are to keep fighting against Nesos and find a way off the island. Who knows, there may be something we can use on the new island!”

Kaidou: “Miss Latte is right! The only way to avenge the others is if we stick together and finish what they’ve left for us to do!”

Jesse: “...”

Mai: “Oh, but a new island does sound lovely, doesn’t it? Perhaps the facilities mentioned will include something fun?”

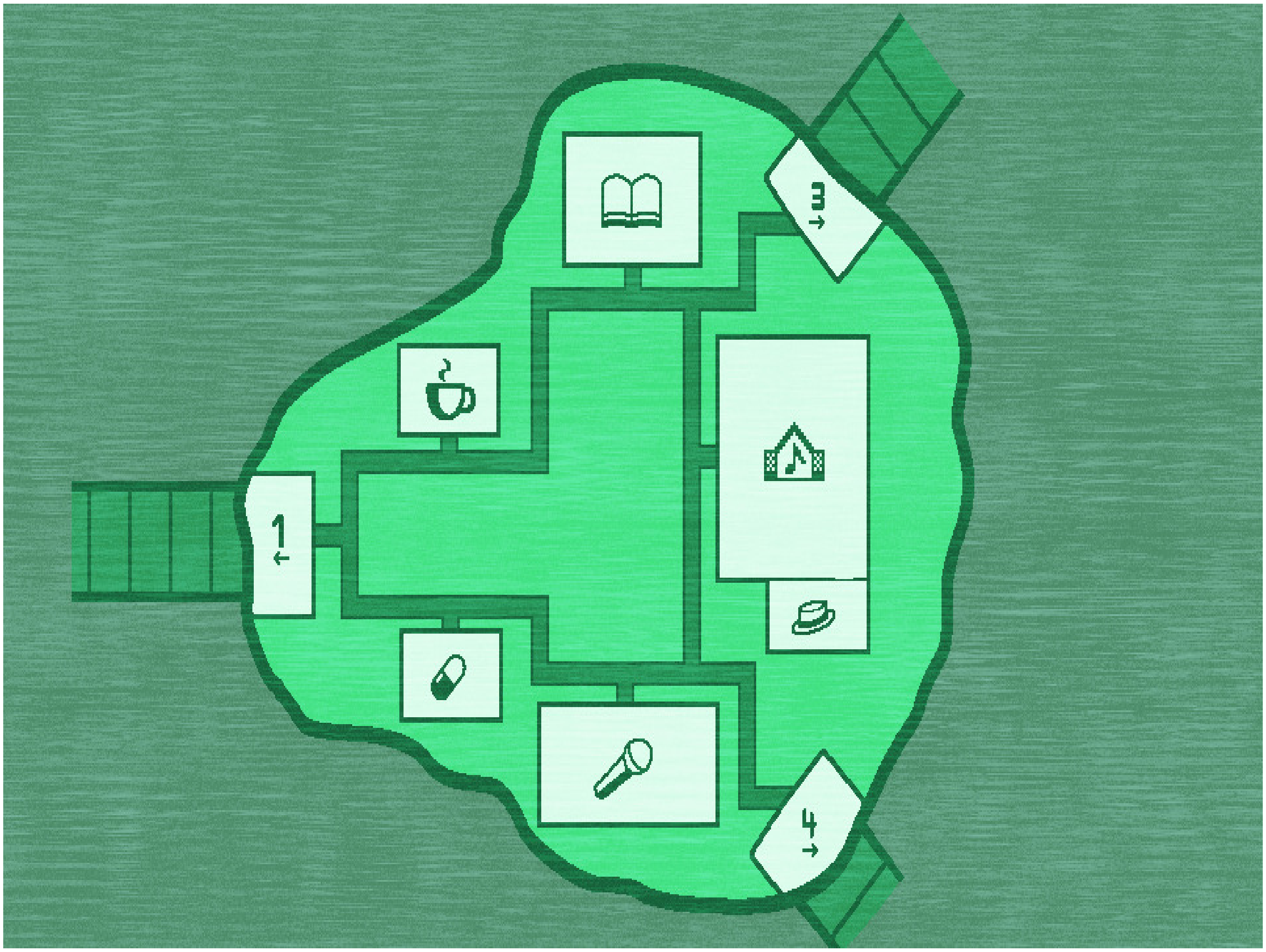
Ena: “I enjoy a good spot of fun! But not too much, or else I’ll get full…”

Retsuko: “I guess we’re all going then…!”

On that final word, the group began to lead out of the hotel and towards the bridge. Hayasaka opted to stick behind Kurumada and Mai as he usually did, growing accustomed to pacing himself a few steps behind as they led his way. The open bridge soon came into view as he approached, and Hayasaka gazed out into the open horizon of the long wooden path. The ocean crashed and lapped against the support beams, the shimmer of the ocean seeping through the small gaps between the planks. After what seemed like an endless trek of walking, they arrived onto the new island.

Hayasaka: (“Just from where I’m standing alone, it doesn’t appear dangerous. Regardless, I’ll keep my guard up in case… Actually, I can just take a look at the map, can’t I?”)

Slipping out his tablet, Hayasaka was glad to see his initiative was correct, and took a quick scan over the new map.



Hayasaka: (“These all look like… normal leisure facilities. Food, entertainment… Definitely wouldn’t strike me as the type for any malicious intent… despite how ironic that statement is in our current situation.”)

Mai: “So what can you see, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Ha? Ah, w-well, if you want to take a look I can…”

Mai: “Oh~! Is that a cafe? Let’s head there first! Yes, yes!”

Kurumada: “Who flicked on the energy switch in you?”

Paying no mind to Kurumada's quip, Mai wandered off in the direction of the cafe, forcing the two to catch up behind her. Upon arrival, a small bell rang out as the door was opened, and Hayasaka was greeted with an oddly familiar-feeling sight. The interior had a quiet yet cosy layout, very much akin to something he would see back at home.

Hayasaka: ("I don't suppose this is supposed to replicate an asian-style of cafe, huh? Yet, it feels awfully nostalgic…")

Mai: "My goodness… This place is just so sweet! It feels like we've never left home…"

Kurumada: "You could say that again. I swear I've been to this type'a place not far from where I live."

Hayasaka: ("I can see even those two have become sentimental, haha… With such western facilities on the first island, it's quite the culture shock…")

Latte: "Ah, hello! I see you three have decided to come here first too? To be given such a peaceful place where you can come for some quiet and a warm coffee… I believe I'll find myself coming here more often than not."

Hayasaka: "I can see why… Now I wish I didn't take my measly coffee breaks for granted, haha…"

Latte: "Perhaps I could delve back into my latte art here… I was quite the nifty cookie at it in the past."

Mai: "Oh, you were into latte art? That's so lovely, Latte! Were there any designs in particular you made often?"

Kurumada: "Is this really the time to be talkin' about this? We got a whole-ass island to investigate."

Latte: "Ah, he's right. I don't want to distract you guys or anything."

Mai: “Oh, no, no! If you want to go look somewhere else, Kurumada, you don’t need to stick around for me. I’ll be fine searching the rest of the island in my own time.”

Kurumada: “...Alright. If that’s what you want.”

Before turning to leave, Kurumada tugged on Hayasaka’s sleeve, who was startled slightly out of his passive state of watching the conversation. He scrambled to follow Kurumada out of the cafe after parting the two ladies with a quiet goodbye.

Hayasaka: (“I’m glad that was resolved rather peacefully. Can I chalk that up to the tranquillity of the cafe? Haha. But still, I feel as if there’s a strange tension between Kurumada and Mai. Perhaps not hatred, but some kind of weird… jealousy? M-Maybe I’m reading too hard into it…”)

The two continued to walk opposite the cafe, where an oncoming pharmacy store came into clearing. Inside, the shelves were stocked with bottles and boxes of prescription drugs and medicines: pills, syrups, bandages and the like could be identified by Hayasaka on different rows. He then felt Kurumada nudge him with a low chuckle.

Kurumada: “Heh, ya think you could identify any helpful drugs?”

Hayasaka: “Why would we need to use drugs in the first place…?”

Kurumada shook his head with an aspirated grunt and walked off into the pharmacy. Hayasaka took the gesture as an opportunity to split off to cover ground, passing a corner to another aisle. It wasn’t a large store by any means, Hayasaka realised, as his eyes idly began to drift over towards some anxiety-relieving pills.

Hayasaka: (“What would it take to convince myself to take these…?”)

Bojack: “I can see you’ve taken a fancy to Xanax. Or is that Prozac? Anyhow, I was gonna take some too. Alongside some other stuff.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, that’s not… that’s not a very smart thing to do. You shouldn’t be taking unprescribed drugs.”

Bojack: “So what? I do it all the time. I need them to get through the day.”

Hayasaka: (“If that really was the case, then why were you never provided any beforehand…?”)

Kurumada: “Oi, you better not be harassin’ him. Hayasaka knows what he’s talking about – and you seriously need to take better consideration over your own health.”

Bojack: “Jesus, what is this now, the second time you’ve said that to me? Look, this has to be getting personal or something.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear…”)

L: “You’re all managing to be rather loud for such a small store.”

The three turned to see L studying the opposite shelf, face painted in its usual blankness and not a single tonal shift laced within his voice. Both Kurumada and Bojack grimaced in his direction, but he paid no mind as he turned a pill bottle around in his grip.

Hayasaka: “L, what’re you doing…?”

L: “Isn’t it obvious? I’m checking to see if there’s anything lethal amongst these medicines. Although, even if there were, I doubt no more than a small proportion of the group would be successful in identifying them.”

Hayasaka: (“For how high-standard some of these medicines seem, I can’t forget how ruthless Monotora and Nesos are. For them to slip in something dangerous for the intent of encouraging murder, you really can’t afford to put it past them. Let’s hope no one looks to me for advice, haha…”)

From L’s interjection, it seemed the heat between Kurumada and Bojack had cooled off, as the two ceased any further bickering and went their separate ways. Hayasaka continued to search around a little further until he met up with Kurumada at the front of the store and the two agreed to move on. Walking down the path, they soon approached the next building: a karaoke bar.

Kurumada: “Out of everything, this is the least expected thing I’d think to see here…”

The interior wasn’t anything extravagant: it was a simple red-black design that would work well to hide nerves during a tipsy night out with friends – not something Hayasaka could ever claim to have experienced, however. The only factor that would set it aside from other sleazy-type karaoke bars was from how clean it was.

Hayasaka: (“I suppose it’s safe to say this place has never been used then… D-Does that mean Nesos created this specifically for us, or…?”)

As he glanced around, Hayasaka spotted Ena and Moony talking by the lobby counter. He cautiously moved over to them while Kurumada was checking around.

Hayasaka: “Ah, have you too, um, made up from your fight…?”

Ena: “Fight? What fight? Oh, you mean the fight from two moons ago! All fights with Moony are simply temporary. There is no discord between us at this moment in the universe.”

Moony: “A fight is healthy every now and then, ain’t it?”

Hayasaka: (“Well, that’s certainly one way to look at it. It seems as if they’ve both completely brushed it off.”)

Ena: “Now then, I would like to inquire on the purpose of this building.”

Moony: “It’s a karaoke bar, square-brain.”

Ena: “And what shall we get up to in such a place?”

Moony: “You know, like singing n’ stuff. Come on, haven’t you even sung before? I sing all the time. I’m pretty popular back at home, heheh.”

Ena: “But don’t you live alone, Moony?”

Moony: “That’s not what I meant! Now your brain is even smaller!”

Ena: “Nooo! I don’t want my brain to shrink! Then I will forget what you have just informed me!”

Hayasaka: “I’ll, um, leave you to it then…”

Hayasaka had mostly said that to himself, as he awkwardly paced away back to Kurumada as the two got lost in their back and forth. He let out a sigh as he noticed Kurumada walk up to someone else, and followed along. It turned out to be Retsuko, who was reaching up onto the counter and picking up one of the microphones in a plastic basket.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Retsuko. I wouldn’t expect to see you here.”

Retsuko: “H-Huh?! Oh, hello…”

Hayasaka: “Did anything in particular draw you to investigate this place?”

Retsuko: “N-No, well, you know, nothing really, haha. Just part of my list – that’s all.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, who’d even think of doin’ karaoke at a time like this?”

Retsuko: “Ah, haha… So silly…”

Hayasaka couldn’t help but raise a brow at the reaction, but shrugged it off. Nothing else worth interest caught their eye in the end, and the two moved on. Approaching the corner of the path, Hayasaka focused his sight down a long path in which another similar gate stood.

Hayasaka: “Is that another bridge over there…?”

Kurumada: “Now that you mention it, it prolly is. ‘Course, I don’t think it’s open.”

Hayasaka: (“And if what L said about murders leading to new island, I really don’t hope we’ll ever see the other side…”)

Turning the corner of the path, they made it towards a large stage bar. From the way it towered over the other facilities, Hayasaka assumed this was the highlight of the island, if only going by size alone. The inside was an open floor with round tables scattered about, accompanied by a long strip of a bar at one side and a stage at the far end.

Hayasaka: (“Something made for nightly entertainment, that’s for sure…”)

Likewise at the pharmacy, he and Kurumada split up to search either end of the extensive seating area. As Hayasaka began to trail up the bar side, a sharp artificial crackling noise emitted from the speakers atop the stage, startling him out of his skin. He whipped his head towards the source to see a familiar boy in uniform meddling around with the staging equipment, face full of panic over what he had just caused.

Kurumada: “Oi, shut that, will ya?!”

Kaidou: “Ah! I-I’m sorry–!”

Kaidou immediately cowered and dropped whatever he was holding, causing an even louder screech to erupt from the speakers. Hayasaka winced at the impact, hands raising to cover his ears. To his relief, however, the noise had been spared from his ears only a moment later, and he looked back to the stage to witness Saiki appear from behind a curtain. Hayasaka gathered he was the one to shut off the speakers in the end, and he mouthed a ‘thank god’ under his breath. He then watched as Kurumada walked further towards the stage.

Kurumada: “What the hell were ya even doin’, anyway?”

Kaidou: “I-I was just wondering if the technology here was still working!”

Kurumada: “Of course it would’ve! D’ya think this place looks abandoned to you?”

Kaidou: “I know that! It’s just that… I was thinking we could take apart the pieces and create some kind of contact device.”

Hayasaka: “Really? I wasn’t expecting you to come up with quite a bright idea, Kaidou…”

Kaidou: “Heh, you know, i-it’s nothing really. It’s not like I even know where to begin with something like that… I bet Hiroshi would’ve had a chance in figuring it out.”

As sudden as he mentioned him by name, Kaidou went quiet. Hayasaka could only assume it was a subconscious afterthought that slipped out by sheer coincidence, and felt a punch of guilt hit him as Kaidou curled in on himself. That was, until Saiki placed a hand on his shoulder, the other perking up at the touch and glancing towards him. After a moment, his straight-lip was quickly washed over with a smirk.

Kaidou: “Ha, don’t worry about me, Saiki. Do you wanna look somewhere else? C’mon – I haven’t even used my x-ray vision yet!”

Grabbing the unsuspecting Saiki by the arm, Kaidou dragged him off to who knows where past Hayasaka. As they left, Hayasaka felt a chuckle attempt to escape his lips at the adorably determined boy’s actions, and he quickly covered his mouth to muffle the sound.

Hayasaka: (“Why am I able to laugh at a time like this…?”)

Kurumada: “You alright?”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Kurumada: “Hey, don’t feel like a burden for feelin’ happy for a few moments, alright? There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Hayasaka nodded. The two carried on investigating the stage bar, eventually straying over to the backstage area. Hayasaka noticed a door which led to a storage room of sorts, but faltered as he saw someone else inside: Jesse. Watching from the doorway, he saw him staring vaguely at a hat that looked akin to Walter’s. From how he neglected to move, Hayasaka concluded he was lost in thought.

Hayasaka: (“I don’t want to bother Jesse, especially if he’s preoccupied right now. Barging in wouldn’t feel ri–”)

Kurumada: “Hey, ya find anythin’ in here?”

Hayasaka: “Ah…!”

Jesse: “...!”

Jesse shot his gaze towards the doorway. Kurumada stared back and crossed his arms regretfully.

Kurumada: “Uh, sorry ‘bout that… I didn’t know you were in here.”

Jesse: “S’fine…”

Hayasaka watched as Jesse picked at the rim of the hat.

Jesse: “Kinda wished I picked up the real deal before Mr. White’s body was removed.”

Hayasaka: “R…Removed? Jesse, what’re you talking about?”

Jesse: “I guess you haven’t been to the beach yet since the murder. Before I went back to the hotel last night, I took a detour to the beach, y’know, to see Mr. White one more time. But, uh, I found that he was gone. Like, completely removed. No glass, no nothin’. As if he was never there in the first place.”

Hayasaka: (“Walter’s body had been removed? I suppose it makes sense: it wouldn’t be very pleasant to keep him there, sanitary and sanity-wise…”)

Jesse flicked his eyes towards the hat once more, before looking distantly at the two.

Jesse: “...At least you’re lucky that neither of you got your other taken away so soon…”

Picking up the hat, Jesse trudged past them out of the room.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Jesse…”)

Kurumada: “...He’s right. I’m glad you’re still by my side.”

Hayasaka paused at the unexpected comment. All he could do was nod, and after making sure anything else had been checked out the two left the stage bar for the final facility of the island past yet another blocked off bridge: the library, somewhere Hayasaka expected to be an easy investigation. Unfortunately for him, it was much bigger on the inside than he anticipated, with multitudes of shelves holding all sorts of genres from novels to non-fiction. The shelves spread out far back into the library; the harder Hayasaka looked, the darker it became. He refrained from wandering too far inside, sticking close to Kurumada as they walked past a seating area presumably for readers able to crack a book open on. It was no surprise that they’d eventually stumble across a duo who he knew had a knack for literature: Natsuki and Yuri.

Natsuki: “Oh, hey. It’s you guys…”

Yuri: “Ah, have we been caught red-handed? We’re sorry if we haven’t been looking very much around the island. It’s just that the library caught our eye first. I’ve never seen so many genres and series all in one place before…”

Hayasaka: “Haha, that’s okay. If it makes you happy, then that’s a good thing, right?”

Kurumada: Heh…”

Yuri: “Oh, I definitely will. I just want to immerse myself in so many novels as soon as I can to forget about everything that’s happened and… A-Ah. I’m not rambling, am I? I didn’t mean to waste your time…!”

Natsuki: “Kinda annoying I haven’t found any manga around, though…”

Kurumada: “Like ya gonna find manga in a library like this.”

Natsuki: “Hmph… W-Whatever. It’s not like I would even be able to get into a manga right now. My mind’s too uneasy to focus on anything really.”

Yuri: “Considering all the facilities on this island, I’m sure there’s at least something we can do together…”

Natsuki: “Um, together, yeah, p-probably…”

Natsuki flusteredly nodded, picking up her pace while Yuri hastened to follow her. Hayasaka decided not to question the two girls as he continued around an oncoming corner to notice a certain suited man checking out a book by himself. Compelled to inquire what he was reading, he and Kurumada walked up to him.

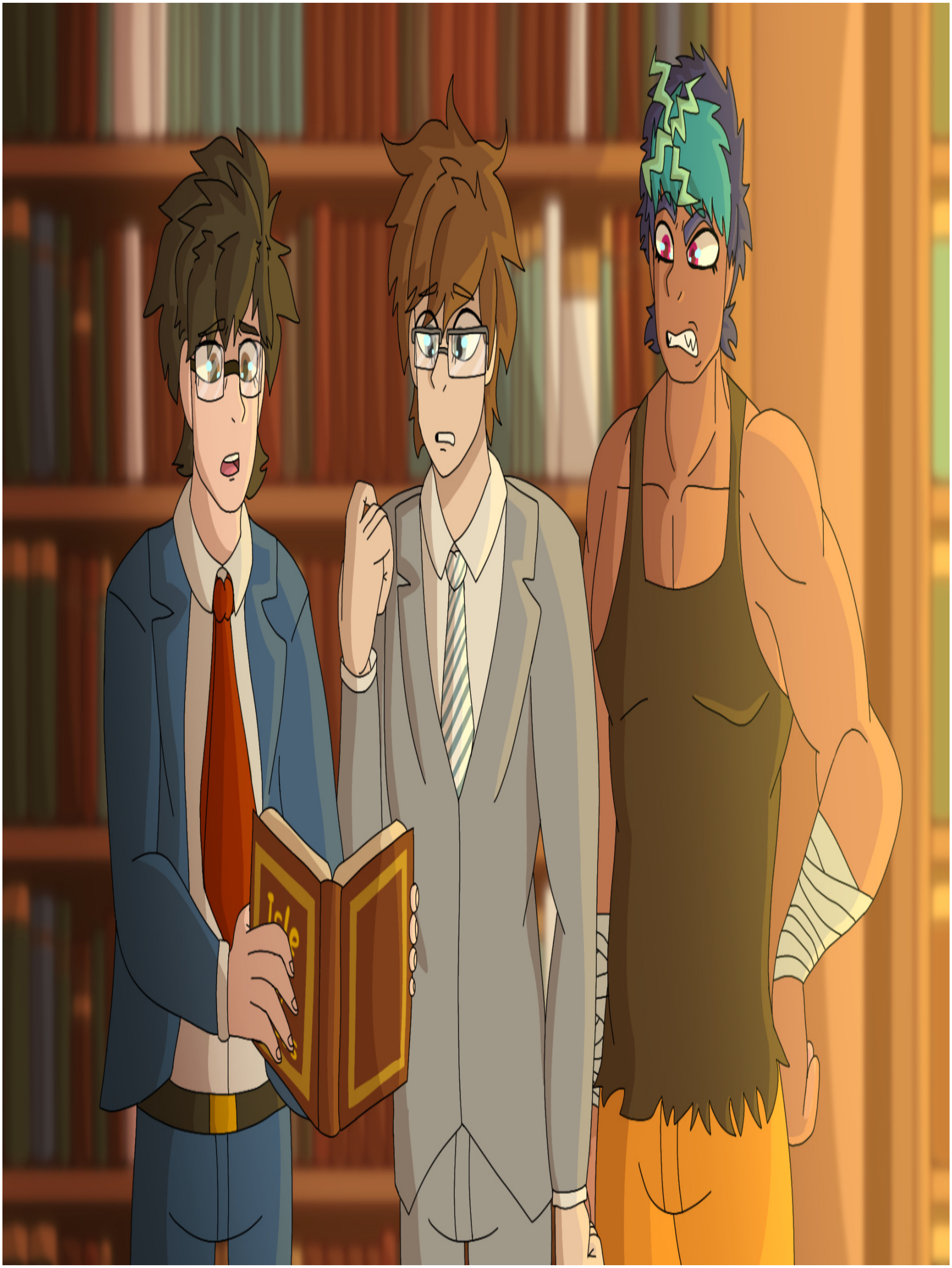
Hayasaka: “Hello, Brian. What’re you doing?”

Brian: “Um, well, I was just sort of looking around the shelves until I spotted this particular book. Apparently, it’s about the island we’re currently on – Island Nesos, that is.”

Kurumada: “Wait, for real? Shit, that’s gotta be important, ain’t it? Show us what you’ve found out so far.”

Brian: “Oh, uh, alright. Here…”

Brian, slightly taken off guard by the sudden request, held out the book to accommodate Hayasaka, who adjusted his lenses as he began to scan around the open page.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Brian: “So, according to the book, the islands never used to look like what they currently are now, with all these resort facilities on them. That probably means the island was renovated recently, right?”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder if this renovation was specifically for this death game… With how everything appears so new and unused, this can’t be a case of an abandoned resort.”)

Brian: “Also, it says that the island was actually home to a small population of people. For instance, they were very talented in fishing and craftsmanship, and I think I recall it mentioning that their symbol was a s–”

Kurumada: “That stuff ain’t important! What I wanna know is where the hell are they now if they’re meant to live here?”

Brian: “T-That… I don’t know. It’s just… I don’t think that this place was meant to be a resort. At all. I mean, the book never mentions anything about the renovations here…”

Hayasaka: (“It doesn’t…? That’s concerning…”) “In any case, thank you for finding this, Brian. I’m sure this’ll be very helpful.”

Hayasaka allowed the book back to Brian, who tried a smile and nodded.

Brian: “I'll hold onto this book for later then. Who knows, it may be more useful than I thought.”

Parting ways with Brian, the two continued their search for a while longer until they deemed scanning their eyes over book after book became too repetitive to endure. Kurumada suggested they head back over to the restaurant to wait for everyone else like before and the two left for the first island. It didn’t take long for everyone to regroup again, Hayasaka believing most were at their wits end in investigating around the same point. Unfortunately, without a certain someone to speak up to permit the discussion to begin, the air was uncomfortably silent.

Kaidou: “Um–alright then, everyone! Let’s report what each of us has found on the new island! Who wants to go fi–”

Bojack: “Okay, well, there’s a pharmacy there. And I actually *am* going to take some antibiotics because my doctor prescribed them to me. Dr. Hu. No not Who. I made that mistake at first as well. Oh and cigarettes too, because there were cigarettes there. Not to say my doctor also prescribed cigarettes to me. No, I’m just taking them because I can.”

Jesse: “...”

L: “While taking drugs from the pharmacy for health reasons is entirely valid, even medicine has the potential to be deadly from large, unfiltered doses alone… Perhaps we need to keep an eye on that place.”

Mai: “I’m sure Hayasaka knows all there is to medicine! He could be our island doctor!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not so sure about that, Mai…”

Yuri: “I-If we need help on anything, I’m sure we’ll find a book about it at the library. There’s a plethora of genres there…”

Natsuki: “I wonder how they managed to get so many books out here in the middle of nowhere…”

Brian: “Considering that renovations were done recently, I’m not sure.”

Kurumada: “You’re talkin’ about that book you found, ain’t ya?”

L: “How intriguing… Perhaps I’ll take a look into that book if you don’t mind.”

Brian: “Oh, um, sure…”

Retsuko: “There’s also a karaoke bar. It’s probably not very helpful to us though, is it?”

Ena: “But I am so interested in the mysteries of the kah-ray-oh-kay bar!”

Moony: “Why’re you saying it like that?”

Mai: “Oh, and don’t forget that quaint little cafe near the bridge. Did you know the inside is based upon a Japanese cafe? Isn’t that just so neat?”

Kurumada: “So I take it you never looked anywhere else then?”

Latte: “Ah, it’s my fault if anything. I kept her behind rambling about all my latte-related stories.”

Mai: “Which I found to be a very good use of my time!”

Saiki: “ *That just sounds like the opposite of good use* …”

Bojack: “So is that it then?”

Kaidou: “Not exactly! There’s a lot of electrical equipment in the stage bar. If we take them all apart, we could somehow make them into a communication device! The Jet Black Wing’s intelligence has saved us all in our time of need!”

Natsuki: “That idea sounds super similar to the boat, you know. I’m not ready to make something that’ll potentially screw us all over in the end.”

Yuri: “It does sound a little dangerous to tamper with electronics without the proper tools…”

Retsuko: “And I really don’t want to be overseen by a poor leader again…”

Jesse: “...”

L: “Then would you all care to reconsider what I proposed earlier about figuring out the identity of Nesos? With this new island, I believe it’s possible to narrow the list of potential suspects of the mastermind… Have you ever thought that it may be possible they have a connection to one or more of us in the group?”

Bojack: “This guy just keeps on talking, doesn’t he…”

Kurumada: “We hardly have any evidence to help us, y’know. Where do you even expect us to start?”

L: “...I have made a disappointment of myself twice in one day. Perhaps I will refrain for some time before I become too depressed.”

Saiki: “ *What is he even talking about* …?”

Kaidou: “But, what’re we supposed to–!”

Jesse: “Why do you even want to keep workin’ right now? Two people have just died – did you forget that or some shit?”

Retsuko: “Jesse?”

Jesse: “Look, hardly any of us are even motivated to do jack, man. Just lay off, alright?”

Kaidou: “B-But… I just…”

Latte: “Hey, don’t say that to him. You know he only had kind intentions.”

Natsuki: “But Jesse’s right. I can’t be pushed any further right now, even if I’m desperate to leave. I’ve been forced to witness a corpse, and fight for my life in a stupid trial. Why do you think I’ll be able to reset and forget about it?”

Bojack: “So why don’t we just do nothing?”

Kurumada: “Aw come the hell on, that’s just ridiculous!”

Retsuko: “I…I believe that we all need just a little break. It won’t upset our workflow if we took a little time off to recover.”

Mai: “I think we’re all going about this the wrong way. Instead of going all out like before, we should start a little more simple. For example, why don’t we try to strengthen the group’s bond, hm?”

Brian: “What do you mean by that…?”

Mai: “You see, the more of us who trust each other, the more teamwork we’ll have and the less chance a murder will ever occur again.”

Kurumada leaned towards Hayasaka, and muttered into his ear.

Kurumada: “ *I bet she’s only sayin’ that so she’s got an excuse to get closer to Latte …*”

Hayasaka: “ *Ah … Y-You never know …*”

Latte: “Oh, I think that’s a great idea, Mai! Bonds are one of the strongest things a team can form! I’d love to get to know you all better anyhow.”

Mai: “So we all agree to make an effort to become acquaintances with one another and not start any fights?”

Bojack: “If saying yes gets me out of here quicker, then yes. Can I leave now?”

Moony: “Thank Runas I can sleep again. Floating around all day tires me out.”

Ena: “Did you know that doing nothing is also a form of doing something?”

And with that, the group split off for the evening, Hayasaka tagging back for a moment to reflect on the discussion.

Hayasaka: (“What Mai’s proposed… It’s something up her alley, isn’t it? Getting along with other people… Is that something I can even do? Can I get along with anyone else? Will anyone make the effort to get along with plain old me? I wouldn’t be surprised if they forgot I was here most of the time, haha…”)

Kurumada: “Plannin’ to stand there until the nighttime announcement? Baha.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, um… Then what’re you planning to do for the rest of the night, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Eh, prolly blow off some steam in the gym. Kinda skipped my ‘sesh yesterday. For you, though, I want you to relax, alright? You’ve looked tense as all hell the entire day.”

Hayasaka: “I-I have…? I suppose I should then…” (“I never even realised… Ah god, I didn’t look weird to anyone, did I?”)

The two then split off as Hayasaka made up his mind on what he was to do: grab a book from the library, make himself a coffee and read in his hotel room. It was simple, but it’s what Kurumada wanted him to do, and to an extent what Hayasaka hoped he could’ve done from the beginning if they all weren’t so suddenly thrown into Walter’s boat plan. He picked out a non-specific fiction book that caught his mild interest, and trekked back across the bridge to the hotel. Hayasaka regretted not having this idea in mind beforehand as all the walking made him certain he’d probably pass out in his bed before even opening the book.

As he entered the kitchen, however, he collided against something that sent him back a step, and a hot liquid spilling over his shirt and blazer. He gasped at the unanticipated heat burning through onto his skin, clenching his teeth in pain. As the sensation died down, he looked up through the spots of caramel brown on his lenses to see a dishevelled Brian staring at him with wide eyes and an empty coffee mug.

Brian: "Hayasaka! I-I'm sorry! God–I-I-I didn't even see you there and–Oh jeeze, um, okay, I can fix this–hang on!"

Brian fumbled around the kitchen until he snatched a wad of paper towels and began to pat down on Hayasaka's stained clothes. Hayasaka simply stood there, half in shock from the stinging pain and half in astonishment of how it all happened so fast. He soon snapped himself out of it as he took a step back from Brian.

Hayasaka: "Um, ah, n-no, it's okay Brian. You don't need to do that. I've done the exact same thing to my boss before, and it ended a lot worse than this, haha… I-I'm sure I saw a spare suit in my room, anyway."

Brian nodded, retracting his hand full of the soaked paper towels and staring at them in uncertainty.

Brian: "...I'm sorry – again – it's just… I've been a little on edge ever since the deaths of… um, y-you know…"

Hayasaka: "That's understandable…"

But then the two were left in silence. Nor Hayasaka or Brian spoke up again, each unsure on what to say next.

Hayasaka: ("Neither of us any good at small talk, huh?")

Brian: "I–I, um, yeah, I'll… I'll just leave now. To, um, leave you to whatever you were going to do in here. So… G-Goodbye."

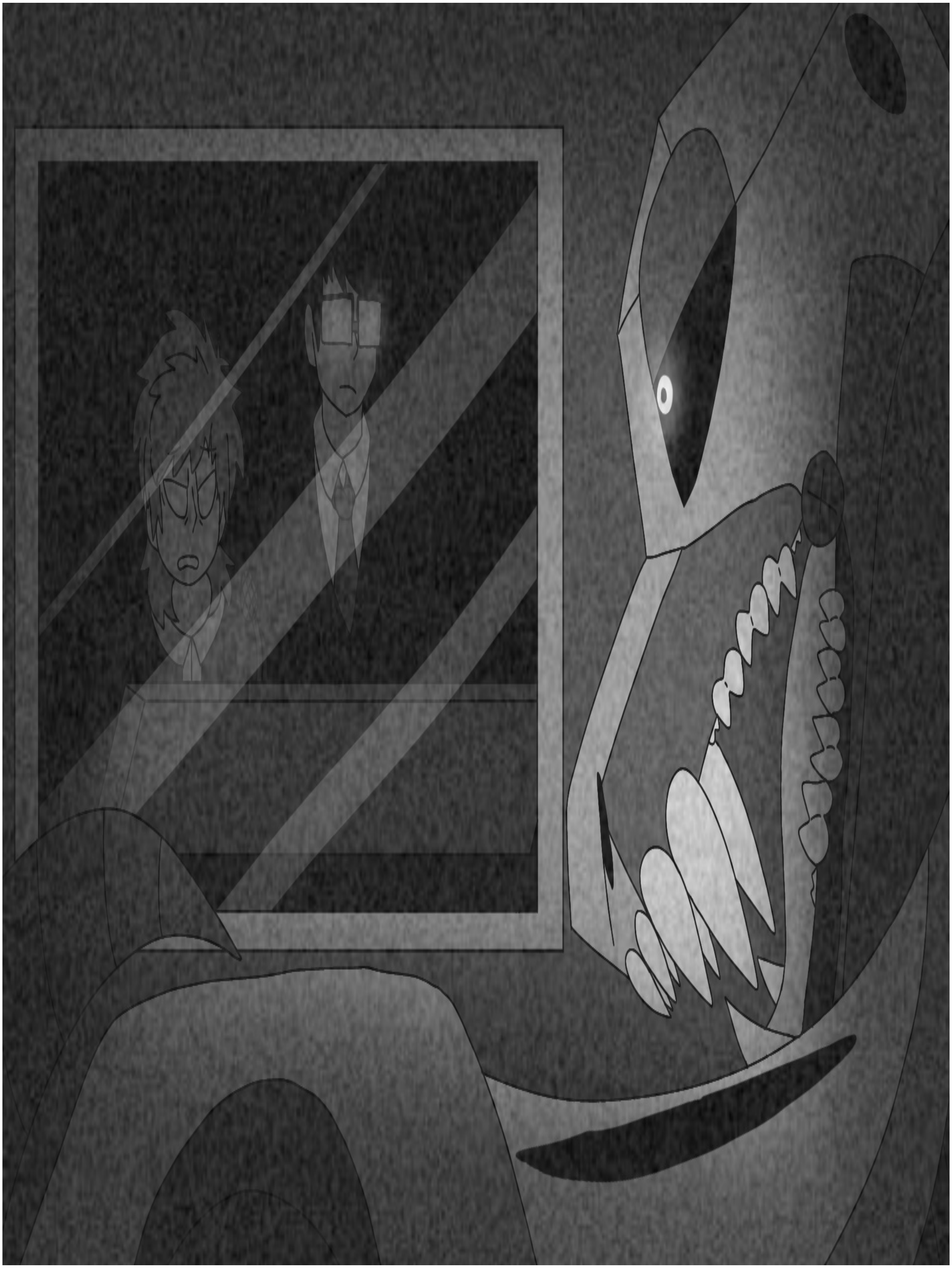
Throwing the paper towels that had begun to soak down into his palms into a nearby trash can, Brian speed-walked out of the kitchen, leaving Hayasaka on his own.

Hayasaka: ("He's not going to make himself another cup of coffee? Well, I can't blame him. I'd probably do the same if I were in his shoes. Now then–ah, I better be quick. My suit's become all sticky. T-That's no good…")

Hayasaka then moved to brew his own coffee, ignoring the heat eating at his torso still. Sneaking back to his room in the hopes that no one would witness him in such a state, he took a quick shower and changed into a clean alternative before spending what little time he could reading with a cloudy mind. The nighttime announcement cut him short of finishing the chapter, but he supposed sleep was more beneficial to him as of late.

Setting the book aside, Hayasaka gently let his eyes close into a sleep in which he hoped no more panic-inducing dreams would occur against his will.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: "Entry five: our team has completed constructing the remaining parts of the body. As we wait for their voice box to be built, they will spend the next few days without their manufactured coat while we relocate them into a large room provided with a thick cage. The team and I will remain in a separate room that allows us to watch them through a large window. They can't see through the window clearly as it's darker on their side, but they are aware that we watch them from out here. They seem to look towards us frequently. But we've done this to ensure that we can all monitor them in a safer environment… and avoid the risk of being attacked."

DING DONG BING BONG

Monotora: "Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead."

The first thing Hayasaka noticed as he sat up in his bed was a face-down open book and a mug with a dried ring of coffee bled onto his bedside table.

Hayasaka: ("Ah dear, was I that drowsy last night? This is what carelessness causes… A-Anyway, I suppose everyone will be meeting downstairs for the morning meeting? I don't suspect anyone will be all that energetic still, however.")

Preparing himself for the day, Hayasaka grabbed the mug before leaving for the kitchen. He swapped the old mug for a cleaner one as he made himself a morning drink, gently blowing on the steam as he walked back into the restaurant.

Hayasaka: ("The numbers are a little low…Neither Kurumada nor Mai are here yet. Am I earlier than expected?")

Kaidou: "Mr. Hayasaka!"

Holding back a noise of startlement, Hayasaka turned to see Kaidou approach him with Saiki in tow, gaze as vacant as it usually was.

Kaidou: "I see you've made it to the morning meeting – I'm glad!"

Hayasaka: “Oh, and where is everyone else then?”

Kaidou: “I’m actually trying to round everyone up just now! It’s kinda annoying, though, as some people have gone missing. But not to worry! No one can escape the Jet Black Wings’ keen eye!”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“And as per usual, Saiki doesn’t seem all that interested… Although, he is tagging along with Kaidou at least.”)

Kaidou: “Well then, there’s only a few more stray to locate! C’mon Saiki!”

Before Hayasaka could fit another word in, Kaidou and Saiki left the restaurant on their search mission. He let out a moderate sigh.

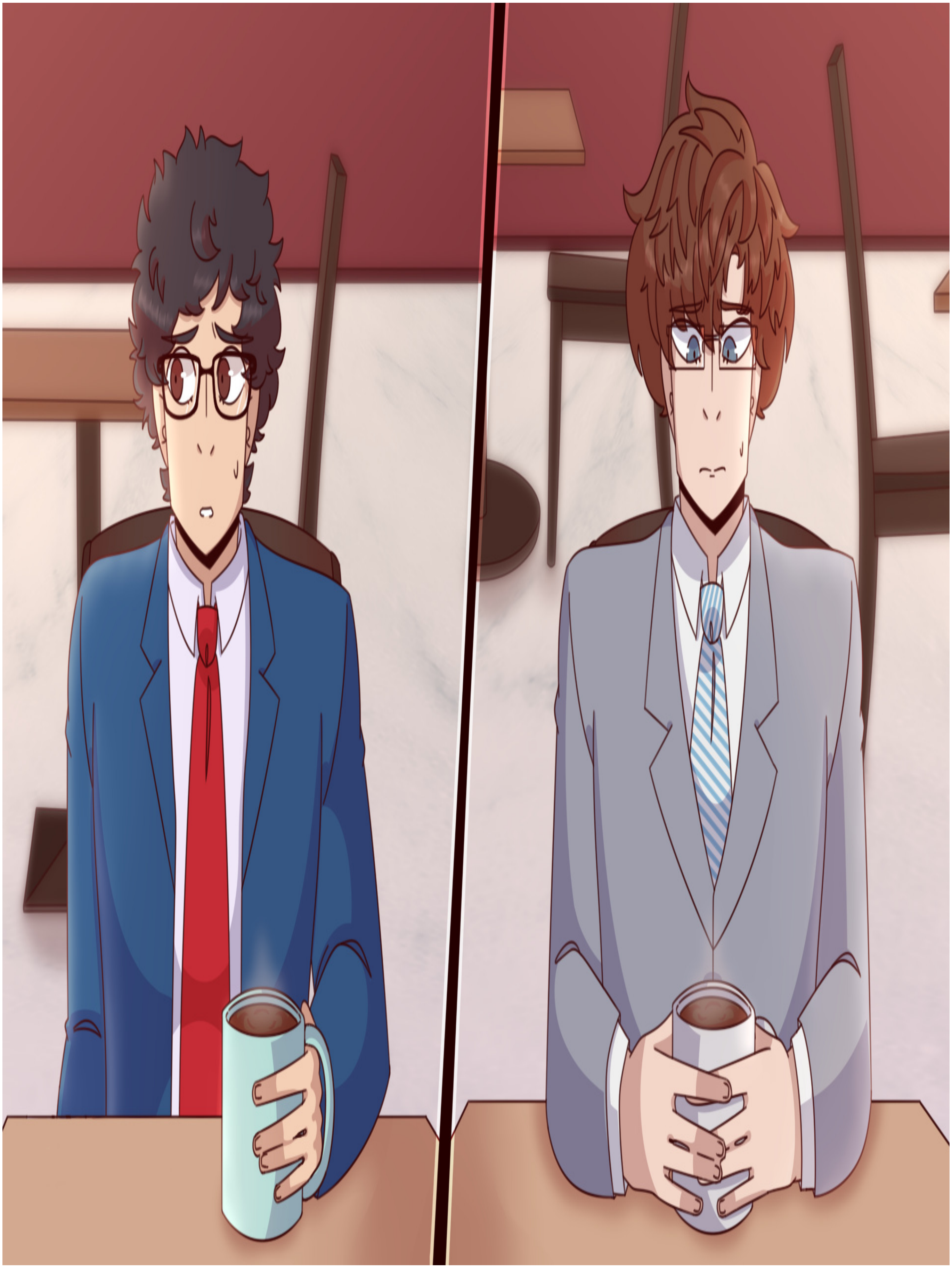
Hayasaka: (“I should probably stick around until everyone arrives…”)

As he scanned around for a place to sit, and very much contemplating taking an undisclosed seat in the corner for a good moment, his eyes landed on a certain individual sitting by himself at a lone table: Brian. Hayasaka paused for a moment, eyes trained on the man. His mind recalled what everyone had agreed to yesterday – that being to form bonds with one another – and felt as if Brian would be the most approachable person to do so. And so, past a minute or so more of hesitation, he walked over to him.

Hayasaka: “Ah, h-hello Brian. Would you mind if I sat here with you?”

Brian: “Huh? Um, not at all.”

Brian nodded cautiously as Hayasaka slipped into the chair opposite.



And yet, just like yesterday evening, the two remained silent. Hayasaka ran a finger around the rim of his mug, eyebrows furrowing in growing frustration of the awkward air lengthening every second that they didn't share a word. Not even the mild background chatter could distract him long enough to fizzle his anxiety. From the corner of his eye, he was swift to notice Brian slowly raise his head towards him.

Brian: "...Your suit."

Hayasaka: "Huh?"

Brian: "Um, your suit. Did you change into the spare one?"

Hayasaka: "Oh, uh, yes, I did. It feels rather similar to my actual one."

Brian: "What do you mean? Is your suit hard to recreate?"

Hayasaka: "Well, I suppose not. But since it's tailor made and all, it couldn't have been a cheap job. Where did you get your suit from, Brian?"

Brian: "Uh, I kinda just got mine from a supermarket…"

Hayasaka raised a brow, but upon further inspection of the suit, he could tell the quality wasn't as sturdy compared to his own.

Hayasaka: "I see… Brian, do you have financial troubles by any chance? I-I'm not asking to be rude or anything. I'm just curious."

Brian: "Huh? Um…Y-Yeah, sort of. I'm not the wealthiest man around, that's for sure. I'm more or less on the lower rank of society. I bet someone like you is a lot higher than I am."

Hayasaka: "No, no, I'm… Ah, how do I put this, I'm just barely stable as anyone else."

Brian: “Oh. Oh–um, sorry. I shouldn’t have assumed things about my superior.”

Hayasaka: (“S-Superior? Where is this coming from?”) “I assure you that I’m really nowhere above you, Brian. We don’t even work for the same company. Well, even if you were to count Nesos, we’re all equals anyhow.”

Brian: “I guess you’re right… Haha.”

Brian rubbed the back of his neck, and Hayasaka swore for a split second he was looking at himself from an outside perspective. Shaking off the out of body experience, he realised the conversation had come to a prompt stump into quiet again.

Hayasaka: “...Ah, Brian, I’ve been meaning to ask you something. I don’t mean to recall the time you slipped on the beach, but it made me wonder if you’ve ever been on vacation before. You had mentioned something about ‘not being used to beaches’...”

Brian: “So you remember that, huh? Yeah, I’ve never really had the opportunity to, u-unless you count this one being my first. Which…isn’t all that great to say the least.”

Hayasaka: (“His perception on vacations might be awfully warped then…”)

Brian: “But, the fact that you woke up here with two friends by your side must’ve been relieving.”

Hayasaka: “...I must admit, I’m truly lucky to have them here with me. I’m sure I’d hardly know how to handle everything by myself otherwise.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, Brian, I didn’t mean to insist that…”

Brian: "...N-No, it's fine. I'm used to doing things alone. I'm actually pretty thankful that you came to talk to me – you're the first person here to really do that."

Hayasaka: ("I am…?") "But what about Retsuko? Hasn't she tried to make the effort? I thought you two worked on the boat together…" ("Not to mention how she tried to invite him out for coffee a few days ago.")

Brian: "Now that you mention her…She has a little bit. Usually just a kind greeting from time to time, but we were always unsure on how to forward the conversation any further. And, well, I did try finding her yesterday, but I couldn't for some reason…"

Hayasaka: ("That's strange… Retsuko *is* small, but she doesn't strike me as the type to wander off too far…")

Just then, Hayasaka heard a commotion erupt from behind him, and he turned in his chair to see Kaidou and Saiki return, alongside the remainder of the missing group members seeping in behind them. He wouldn't have paid much mind, if not for the fact that he was bewildered to see Bojack with an unexpected person in tow: Retsuko. From their lethargic appearance alone, he could tell the two were mildly hungover, Bojack moreso, or at least more obviously so.

Retsuko: "Uuu, my head…"

Kaidou: "Adults really shouldn't be drinking at a time like this! It's too irresponsible!"

Bojack: "Yeah, yeah, ugh, whatever the hell. I need some water."

Bojack dismissed Kaidou's scolding as he dragged his heavy feet towards the kitchen.

Hayasaka: ("So those two… went out drinking last night?")

Latte: "Retsuko, I didn't know you liked to drink. You seem like the responsible type."

Retsuko: “Ah, I’m sorry. Please don’t take it the wrong way. You see, I was invited to drink with Bojack at the stage bar last night, which I assumed would only include a few drinks. Turns out we must’ve drank a lot more than I thought. I promise to lay off next time.”

Hayasaka: (“Then why don’t you just stop altogether…?”)

Being infatuated with Retsuko’s conversation, Hayasaka hadn’t noticed that Kurumada had strolled into the restaurant until he was right by his table.

Kurumada: “Eavesdroppin’ on anything particularly interestin’?”

Hayasaka: “W-What? I’m not–I’m not really eavesdropping…”

Kurumada: “Bwaha, I’m just messin’. So, yeah, I’m kinda late again – being in the gym an’ all that…”

Kurumada’s gaze then shifted opposite towards Brian, and his playful smile faltered for a moment.

Kurumada: “What’s been goin’ on over here then?”

Hayasaka: “Nothing much. Just a small chat, that’s all…”

Brian: “H-Hello…”

Kurumada stared a Brian for a moment longer, causing him to shift in his seat uncomfortably, before nodding.

Kaidou: “Alright! Now that we’re all here, let’s begin the morning meeting! …Um, hello?”

Despite Kaidou’s announcement, not many people had paid much mind, continuing their separate conversations or eating their meals.

Saiki: “ *Well, that was pretty useless.* ”

Latte: “Hang on, Kaidou.”

Latte stepped forward, clapping her hands with a defiant sharpness, causing everyone to look her way. She then gestured towards Kaidou with a smile, and he returned a bashful one before shaking it off as he composed himself and pushed out his chest.

Kaidou: “T-Thank you, Miss Latte…–Uhm, anyhow, let’s start the meeting, everyone! I’ve decided what we’re going to be doing today: to find any electronic pieces around the islands for my proposed idea from yesterday.”

Bojack: “Nope, can’t do that–”

Bojack walked out of the kitchen with a glass of water in hand.

Bojack: “–Too hungover.”

Kaidou: “Then you shouldn’t have drunk in the first place! We need everyone on board like last time to help!”

Natsuki: “I’m not trying to be rude or anything, but Bojack really didn’t do much to help build the boat. He slacked off more than anything else.”

Bojack: “Hey, I’d take way more offensive to that if I wasn’t hungover right now. Also because you’re actually right.”

Retsuko: “Actually, I’m set to help out. I did say yesterday that we’d start working today, didn’t I? So, I’ll try my hardest despite my headache, and I’m sure you want to do the same, right Bojack?”

Bojack: “...You know what? Yeah, I will. I can prove you all wrong. I can do shit when I want to.”

L: “He has become selfishly determined…”

Jesse: “Hey, uh, Bojack, d’you think we can hang while you look around…?”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse…?”)

Bojack: “Uh… Well, you can’t. Because I’ve already made plans with Retsuko here.”

Saiki: “ *But you only agreed to help just now* …”

Jesse: “Oh. S’cool…”

Jesse shrugged and turned to leave the restaurant. Eventually, everyone else split off as per Kaidou’s instruction, Hayasaka spending the rest of the day searching around for any useful electronic parts with Kurumada. He noticed Brian trail a little ways behind them from time to time, but he kept oblivious to it as he was unsure if it was a mere coincidence or not. When the sun had begun to sink into the horizon, painting the sky in a deep blood orange, Hayasaka and Kurumada decided to give up for the evening, parting ways to wind down. As Hayasaka began to make his way back to the hotel, he was approached by someone who appeared a little apprehensive.

Jesse: “There you are, Mr. Hayasaka. Thank god I found you…”

Hayasaka: (“M-Mr…?”) “Ah, Jesse. Um, why did you need me of all people?”

Jesse: “Look, I sorta need your help with something. To me, you’re like one of the most formal-lookin’ people in the group. You kinda look like you have some type of authority with your suit n’ shit, so, uh, can you help me convince Bojack to let me drink with him and Retsuko?”

Hayasaka: (“Well that was a little unexpected…”) “...W-Why does it have to be me? Why can’t you simply ask him yourself?”

Jesse: “I did, man. But he just blew me off – completely ignored me like I wasn’t even there.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s strange. Bojack offered to stick with Jesse during the investigation of Walter, and even somewhat in the trial… B-But, I don’t want to be rude, so…”) “O-Okay. I’ll try to help, I suppose…”

Jesse: “Thanks, yo.”

Following Jesse over to the stage bar, Hayasaka caught sight of the two – Bojack and Retsuko – sitting at the bar side, chatting and joking with each other as if they’d been life-long friends catching up after a hard day. With all the shot glasses and bottles scattered around the top, it was safe to assume a good few drinks had been downed already.

Bojack: “I mean, it’s insane how easily the press can warp your image to their liking.”

Retsuko: “I understand what you mean. It’s very similar to my office’s gossip: one wrong slip and suddenly my coworker’s running up to me the next day and asking if I just had a baby, haha.”

Bojack: “Jesus. Well, did you?”

Retsuko: “What?! No! Don’t be stupid!”

Bojack: “Haha, okay, but did you just see the look on your face just then?”

Retsuko: “Eh? No way, you said that on purpose, you asshole!”

Bojack: “Whoa, looks like little miss accountant can swear after all.”

Retsuko: “Only ‘cuz you deserved it!”

The two erupted into sloppy giggles as Hayasaka stood there in unease.

Hayasaka: (“It’s awfully jarring seeing Retsuko act this way…”)

Just then, he felt a nudge on his arm. He turned to see Jesse shoot him a look, and he sighed deeply as he hesitantly stepped over to the intoxicated duo. Their attention shifted to him as he cleared his throat.

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, h-hello…”

Retsuko: “Oh, hey Hayasaka!”

Bojack: “Mm. So, as I was saying…”

Hayasaka: “W-Wait, erm, before you continue, is it alright if Jesse joins you two…? Just, um, i-it would be nice if you could…”

Hayasaka faltered on his words as he glanced towards Jesse for reassurance. Bojack followed his gaze before pinching the bridge of his snout and letting out a sharp exhale.

Bojack: “I already told you this, Jesse. Kids can’t join us.”

Jesse: “I ain’t no kid, yo! I’m the same age as Retsuko!”

Bojack: “Fucking–god, fine. No Todds then.”

Jesse: “What the hell do you mean by a Todd?”

Bojack: “Because you remind me of my old friend who used to crash at my house. All he did was steal my couch, go on wacky shenanigans, and never pick up his shit. You know what, maybe I should start calling you Todd 2.”

Jesse gave Bojack a wild look as a giggle slipped out of Retsuko as she tried to cover it with her paws.

Bojack: “See? Looks like our audience is in favour of it. Pick up your shit, Todd 2.”

The two started to laugh again as Hayasaka stood there, increasingly unsure on what to do and feeling his palms become clammy.

Jesse: “Argh–screw off, bitch!”

Jesse turned sharply on his heel as he stomped out of the stage bar, Hayasaka quickly chasing after him in worry.

Hayasaka: “J-Jesse, ah, I’m sorry that I couldn’t convince them… Did you still want someone to hang out with?”

Jesse: “...No, it’s fine. It’s not your fault. I just wanna be alone now.”

Hayasaka: “Oh. I see…”

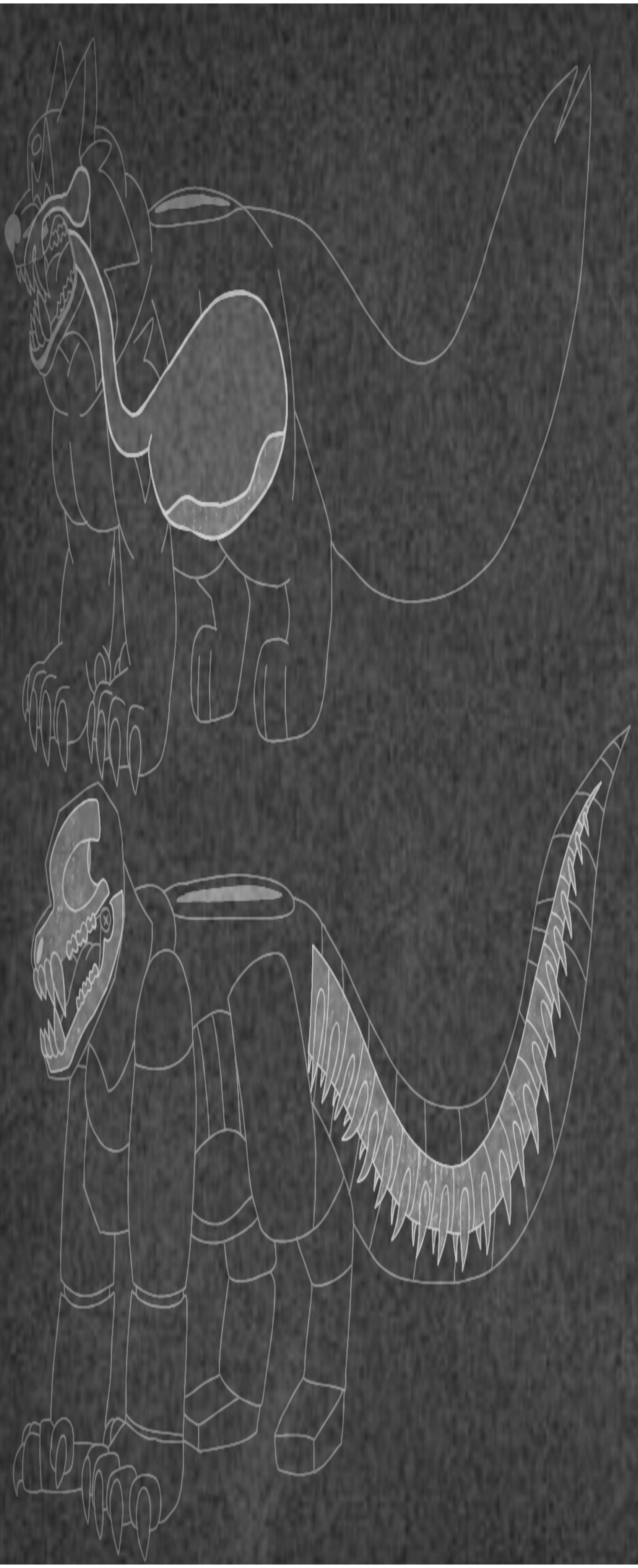
Jesse: “…Y’know, I thought maybe chillin’ with someone my vibe would help me get my mind off’a Mr. White, but seeing as he already has his ‘best friend’, I’m no longer in the mood to give a damn…”

Parting with that mutter, Jesse walked off into the night. Hayasaka remained stationary for a moment, a guilty feeling enveloping his gut.

Hayasaka: (“I can’t help but feel upset for him, but I know I can’t do much by myself to help him. He’s obviously still grieving, and there’s no way I could ever lay it on thick with Bojack… Haha, what a tense end to the evening.”)

Curling his hands into stiff fists, Hayasaka left for his hotel room to turn in for the night. The nighttime announcement played some point while he prepped for bed, attempting to shake the memory of the awkward encounter from his mind as he slipped underneath the covers and closed his eyes.

-MONOTORA FILES-



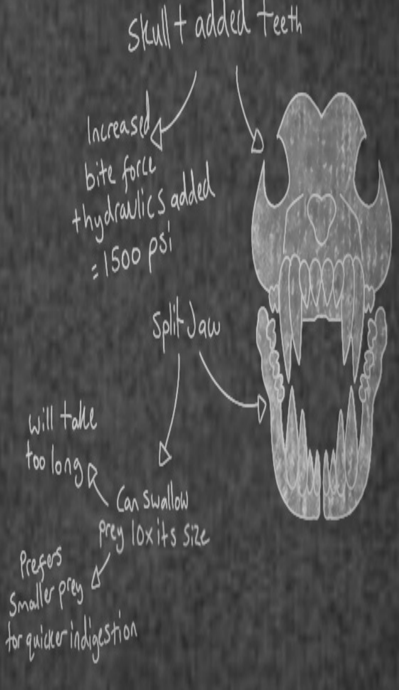
MONOTORA

Height: 4'5ft (quadrupedal)

Length: 10ft (estimated)

Weight: 250-275lbs

Species: Panthera Tigris
Eunectes Murinus


Skull + added teeth
Increased bite force +hydraulics added =1500 psi
Split Jaw
Will take too long
Can swallow prey 10x its size
Prefers smaller prey for quicker indigestion

???:" Entry six: as the artificial digestive system is being finalised, I have been requested to detail how exactly it will function. Following the ingestion of meat, the synthesised enzymes will break down the protein molecules and will convert the amino acids into energy. This energy will be used to power their functions without having to rely on a charging station. This way, they will be able to replenish themselves on their own, so we don't have to interfere when they're low on power. The boss said they designed it this way so they'd be able to roam around freely, but… just what the hell is this thing made to do?"

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead.”

As Hayasaka went about his usual morning routine, he heard a knock on his door. Originally assuming it was from Kurumada, he was somewhat surprised to find it was someone he didn’t have to crane his head up to look at.

Brian: “Um, g-good morning!”

Hayasaka: “Oh, good morning Brian. Is there something you need?”

Brian: “Do you want to grab a coffee with me at the restaurant? I just thought, if you’re not busy or anything…”

Hayasaka: “I don’t see why not.”

Brian: “Oh, really? Ah, thank goodness. I was a little nervous to do this, actually…”

Hayasaka: “Haha…Isn’t that relatable?”

The two walked together down to the restaurant, Hayasaka mentally thanking Brian’s appearance in distracting him from becoming too pitiful to start the day. From the way Brian was mildly apprehensive in picking up his coffee cup from the counter, however, he could tell he was still guilt-ridden over the spill from a few days back. Hayasaka felt compelled to say something about it, but he kept his mouth shut in the fear that he may make things more cumbersome between them. A couple of minutes passed by until everyone had arrived as per usual.

Kaidou: “So then, how did you all manage yesterday? Did we all find enough parts?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah…the electronic parts. Unfortunately, me and Kurumada didn’t find too much yesterday. Let’s hope the others were more successful…”)

Hayasaka’s nerves only flared up once he registered that the group had remained silent.

L: “...I won’t lie to you, I hadn’t looked anywhere at all. I decided to remain focused on my own case yesterday.”

Retsuko: “And I can’t seem to remember much of anything from yesterday. My headache’s much worse than before…”

Bojack: “You should probably take something from the pharmacy. I normally like to pair my painkillers with scotch.”

Retsuko: “I think water will do me alright…”

Hayasaka noticed Jesse roll his eyes out of the corner of his eye.

Latte: “To be honest, even me and Mai didn’t have much luck, and we just ended up going to the cafe in the end.”

Saiki: “ *Even the teacher didn’t care enough to try…* ”

Kaidou: “What the? You can’t *all* drop out of helping! Why are none of you taking this seriously?”

Natsuki: “I’m doing the best I can, alright? And pieces or not, me and Yuri have *no* experience in engineering, and surely you don’t either.”

Kaidou: “T-That… O-OK, well, I don’t…–But despite that, we can’t give up for Walter and Hiroshi’s sakes!”

Jesse: “Why should we? They never wanted to help us. They were selfish assholes who were only looking out for themselves. They both tricked us – why the hell do you wanna commemorate that?”

Kaidou: “I…T-That’s not…That’s not what I…”

Latte: “Jesse, there’s no right for you to say that to him!”

Jesse: “Oh great, now what? Am I not allowed to be honest? Do you really think we should be doing this for ‘their sakes’? As if they ever had a fuckin’ sake to begin with.”

Mai: “Jesse?”

Ena: “Oh dear! A fight is breaking out! Shield your eyes!”

Kurumada: “Damnit, you all need to shut the hell up! This ain’t going anywhere–!”

DING DONG, BING BONG

The riled-up crowd came to a swift pause as they all turned their attention towards the nearby monitor. Hayasaka, concerned as to why an announcement was playing at such an odd time, felt his body become heavy.

Monotora: “Listen up, you bastardly lot! Make your way to Nesos park for a very special announcement. But don’t you dare be late, or else I’ll drag ya kickin’ and screamin’ by the teeth! Kehehe!”

Silence lingered even after the video feed had flickered off. A few glances around at one another sent the message clearly: they needed to go despite their growing dubiety. And so, once arriving at the park, Monotora popped out from behind the fountain and leaped up onto the duo-snake statue.

Monotora: “Mmm…Hehe, the scent is tense ‘round here. Conflict is one hell of a potent smell!”

Kurumada: “What the hell do you want with us, damnit?”

Monotora: “Oh, nothin’ much. Just decided to give you all the heads up on the new *motive* is all. Nesos requested this one be given out a lil’ earlier than usual, y’see.”

Hayasaka: (“A motive? Ah jeeze, this can’t be good… I almost forgot about them, despite…”)

Hayasaka brushed his hand over the pocket where he kept his letter, a small tremor present in his fingers.

Monotora: “Nah, don’t worry. This one’s gonna be a lot more interestin’ than the last one. Say, did everyone have a good sleep last night?”

Yuri: “H-Huh…?”

Ena: “I slept very well, my good sir! Like a baby, even!”

Monotora: “Kehehe, ain’t that just the best? Hope ya don’t miss it, as that’s gonna be the last time you’ll ever get to sleep again!”

Mai: “What do you mean by that…?”

Monotora: “Puttin’ it simply for the dumb ones, no one’s gonna get a single wink of shut-eye until the next murder occurs! This means sleepin’ in ya rooms at night, or tryin’ to cop a nap at any time’s strictly prohibited! If I spot any one of you dozin’ off, you’ll be promptly punished by yours truly, kehe.”

Natsuki: “What? That’s insane! How do you expect us to cope with that?”

Retsuko: “That can’t be true! You can’t take sleep away from us!”

Monotora: “I invite ya to sleep tonight as per usual if you think I’m lyin’, but don’t complain when I rip ya limb from limb for doin’ so! Ahahaha!”

Disappearing into the trees, Monotora abandoned the group in the midst of their disarray.

Brian: “...What should we do now? A-About the motive, I mean…”

L: “I think the best course of action to take currently is to cease any more unnecessary in-fighting. It’ll only tire us out more than we need.”

Jesse: “Guess you can’t drink anymore, huh Bojack? You’ll probably just pass out or somethin’.”

Bojack: “Then I’ll just take drugs to *not* pass out. God, Todd 2, you really are as stupid as the original.”

Jesse: “Ggh…! Fuck you man, I’m gonna go smoke…”

And with that, Jesse stormed off out of the park.

Retsuko: “That was a little too far, Bojack…”

Bojack: “Then what’re you planning to do about this motive?”

Retsuko: “Hum… I have my own special way of dealing with things at night, I suppose.”

Kaidou: “Uh, alright everyone! Just stay calm… B-But I sorta need to rethink my plan over…”

Saiki: “ *You need a whole new plan in of itself* …”

As everyone began to confide with each other, Hayasaka turned to his friends.

Hayasaka: “Ah, w-what do you two think of the new motive?”

Mai: “It’s a little scary, isn’t it? Not being able to sleep…Perhaps if we were to stock up on coffee we could make it? Hehe.”

Kurumada: “Good news for Hayasaka – he’s already jacked up on caffeine, bwaha.”

Hayasaka: “H-Haha…Am I really a caffeine addict in your eyes?” (“And you two aren’t necessarily safe then if that’s the case…”)

At that moment, Natsuki and Yuri came up to the three, the former staring at the cobblestone for a moment before clearing her throat.

Natsuki: “Hey, do any of you wanna come to our book club?”

Kurumada: “Nah, I’m not much for readin’.”

Yuri: “Maybe you’d be into it, Hayasaka… I-If that isn’t a rude assumption to make!”

Hayasaka: “I-I suppose I don’t mind coming along… Why not?”

Natsuki: “Just to clarify, we’re not doing it for ourselves, alright? We’re doing it for everyone to get along better. It’s just that… I feel guilty for complaining all the time, you know? In reality, I just wanna go home as much as everyone else.”

Mai: “Aw, that’s so thoughtful of you to take my advice, Natsuki! Ah, but I unfortunately can’t go. You see, I’ve already made plans with Latte today. I do hope I can repay the gesture in the future.”

Natsuki: “It’s fine. I wasn’t expecting everyone to go.”

Yuri: “If you still want to come, Hayasaka, then we’ll be in the library at noon.”

Hayasaka nodded, and they all eventually split off for the day.

Hayasaka: (“I still have some time before noon…Maybe I should try my hand again at talking with someone? I know Kurumada isn’t telling me to like last time, but I’ve gotten used to passing the time with it. A-And it doesn’t hurt to make acquaintances now, does it?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Retsuko at the cafe.

Retsuko: “I still find it a little strange how we haven’t been provided with any staff…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Retsuko. Would you like to have a chat with me, perhaps?”

Retsuko: “Oh, Hayasaka! Thank you for inviting me to talk!”

Hayasaka spent some time with Retsuko. Unsure what she would like, Hayasaka gifted her an abacus.

Retsuko: “You’re too kind to give me a gift for no reason, Hayasaka! But, what made you think I would like this in particular?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, w-well I suppose an accountant would enjoy an abacus, right? U-Unless you see that as a cruel joke…”

Retsuko: “Hm, well, it reminds me of home at least…”

Hayasaka: (“I’m glad she likes it.”)

Retsuko: “Again, thank you for wanting to spend time with me, Hayasaka! I’ll try to be as pleasant as possible!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, it’s no burden, I assure you. I just thought you would appreciate the company.”

Retsuko: “Did you have something in mind you wanted to talk about?”

Hayasaka: “Hum… I suppose I *am* curious about how you got your talent. It was… the Ultimate Heavy Metal Vocalist, right? I-I have to agree with what Mai said before: you don’t really look the type for such a thing, haha.”

Retsuko: “Um… H-Haha, well you can’t judge a book by its cover, can you?”

Hayasaka: “You’re right. I-I apologise.”

Retsuko: “It’s alright! A lot of people said the same thing… Ah, how about your talent? I don’t remember if you mentioned it during our first meeting.”

Hayasaka: “O-Oh, that… It’s a little ridiculous, but it’s the Ultimate Office Worker. I-I know it’s not the best talent, but…”

Retsuko: “Oh, no! That’s a good talent – it makes you sound responsible! A-A lot more responsible than mine, haha… Oh, I guess that’s why I wasn’t given such a talent then. I wish I did, then people would stop asking about the ‘heavy metal’ one…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I do recall you mentioned you were an accountant, didn’t you? What do you get up to?”

Retsuko: “I work for a company called Carrier Man Trading, in the accounting department! Well that part was obvious, wasn’t it? Haha.”

Hayasaka: “Haha… Are you getting along like the rest of us, then?”

Retsuko: “While I would say I’m pretty decent at accounting, being in the office itself is quite a pain.”

Hayasaka: “You can say that again. Rude coworkers, demeaning boss… I suppose experience is universal, haha.”

Retsuko: “Same! I hate my boss so much! He’s–he’s such a jerk!”

Hayasaka: “O-Oh…”

Retsuko: “Eh! S-Sorry for the outburst! I just had to get it off my chest…”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s fine. I don’t mind you being passionate.”

Retsuko: “It’s just… Ton, my boss, seems to get off from abusing me, you know? He gives me extra work, makes me brew tea for him – and gets mad if I don’t do it to his standards – and makes comments about every little thing I do.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Retsuko, I-I’m so sorry about that…”

Retsuko: “It’s okay. It’s not like you can do anything about it, huh? I mean, I do feel a little better about my job after ‘blowing off steam’.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Retsuko: “Um, d-don’t worry about it, haha. It’s a secret.”

Hayasaka: “I see…” (“Ah, the conversation went quite off topic. I didn’t get to learn much about her talent. Perhaps next time?”)

The two parted ways after a while. When noon struck, Hayasaka decided it would be best to make his way towards the library. Passing by the hotel lobby, he crossed paths with Brian who was fiddling around with the present machine. Hayasaka paused as Brian spotted him and picked himself up from his slouched position.

Brian: “Oh, Hayasaka. Where’re you going?”

Hayasaka: “Me? I’m just going to the library for Natsuki and Yuri’s book club. You could say I was, um, half-invited, half-sympathy dragged, haha. Ah, would you like to tag along if you’re not busy?”

Brian: “Really? Sure! I didn’t really have much going for me today… as per usual.”

Hayasaka had to admit to himself while he and Brian started to walk together to the library that it was an odd occurrence for him to ever impulsively invite someone else out somewhere. For any normal person on the extroverted side, they’d see nothing out of the ordinary, but in Hayasaka’s case, it left his cheeks flushed in an inescapable heat of regret. Was it seeing Brian hunched all alone that made him pity him? Or was it simply because he had grown accustomed to Brian’s company? Either way, as the tall library building encased his view, he put in a mental pin in his dilemma. They swerved their way through bookshelves until they reached the seating area, where Natsuki and Yuri were seated alongside two extra members: Kaidou and Saiki. Natsuki sighed in relief upon seeing the two arrive, and stood up from her chair with a soft creak.

Natsuki: “Thank god you actually came. I mean, I did say I was expecting some people to decline, but I didn’t want *no one* to show up, you know? … *Well, it’s not as if I wanted any loud people polluting the library anyway* .”

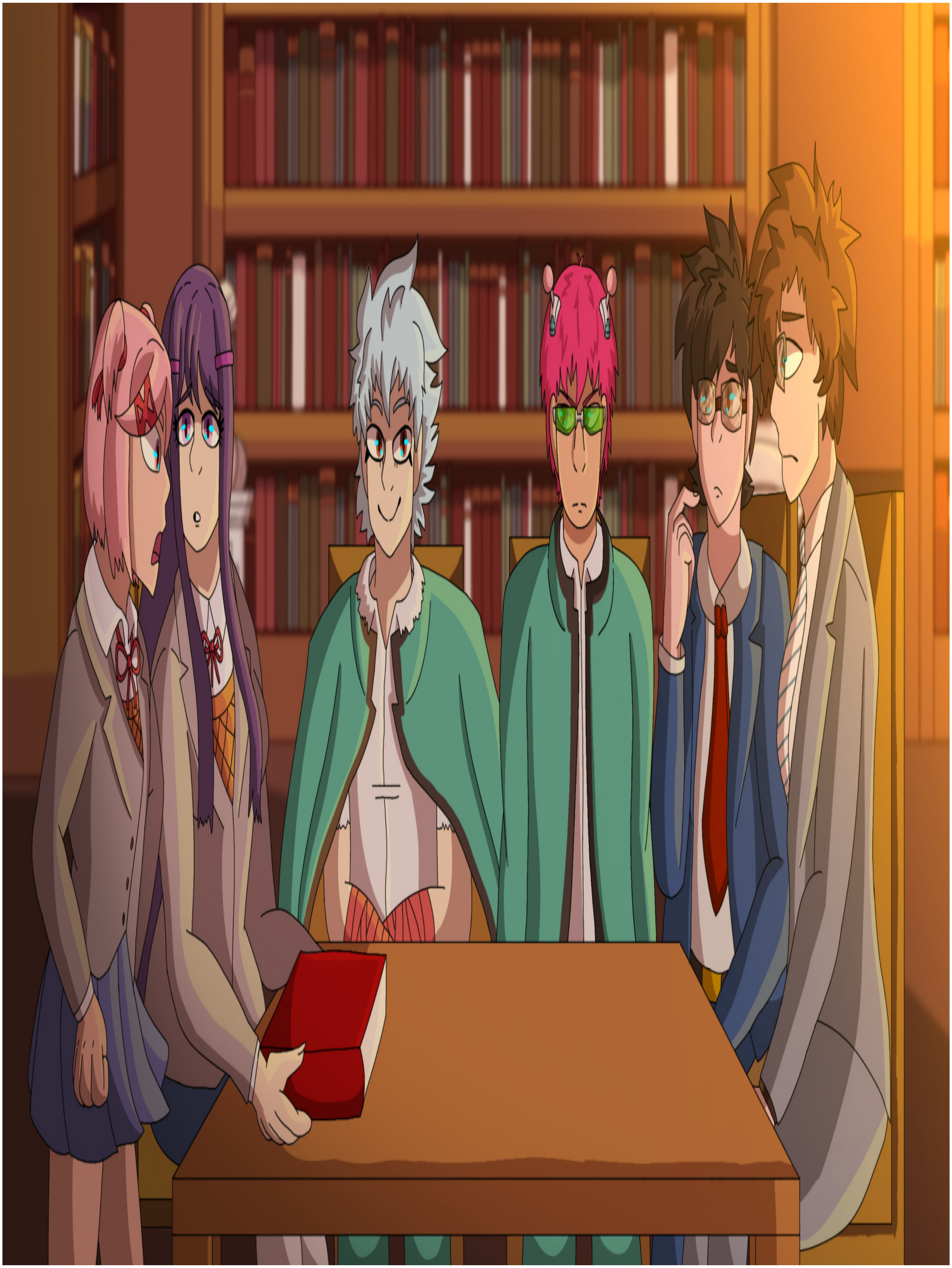
Natsuki had mumbled the last part as an afterthought under her breath, but when Hayasaka caught it he couldn’t help but share the sentiment.

Hayasaka: “Haha… So, is it just us then? I would’ve thought you were working on your plans, Kaidou.”

Kaidou: “I would be, but I’m kinda at a loss at the moment. Being in command of this group is a lot more challenging than I thought, but I can still help out by using the book club as a way to strengthen our bonds! …But mainly it’s because me and Saiki were dragged here by Natsuki.”

Natsuki: “Hey!”

Saiki: “ *But he’s right, you know …*”



Brian: “So what’re we going to do?”

Natsuki: “About that…I hadn’t really decided on what to do more than worrying over if anyone was gonna show up.”

Yuri: “I assumed we were all going to be reading our own book of choice… Isn’t that what a book club is?”

Natsuki: “But that’s gonna make things quiet, and not to mention awkward. We need something that can bring us closer together. Um… Okay! I’ll find us all a book we can read together! Yuri, let’s read your book!”

Yuri: “U-Uwa? Um, I don’t know…My book is a little on the dark side, so I’m not sure if you’ll all be into it, a-and…”

Kaidou: “I know! I’ll find us a book to read!”

Natsuki: “Hey, wait, you can’t just–! *Huff* …”

Kaidou had leaped up and dashed into the shelves, Natsuki following along in an attempt to find a book herself.

Brian: “...What’s your book about then, Yuri?”

Yuri: “It’s…It’s about this group of people who are looking for this comic that is rumoured to have predicted the future on a horrible dystopia. However, an organisation has also been trying to track down the comic too. Right now I’m at this one part where one guy has been caught by two men and questioned in his basement. They start to torture him by pouring all sorts of powders into his eyes, and eventually one of the men scoops out one of his eyes with a spoon. However, he manages to escape his handcuffs by dislocating his thumb and–...”

Yuri promptly paused as she realised the horrified faces painted across Brian and Hayasaka, and she tensed up in concern.

Yuri: “A-Ah, um, I’m so sorry! This is why I didn’t want you all reading it…”

Saiki: “ *Well that’s one way to kill the mood* .”

Before long, Natsuki and Kaidou returned, both carrying a generous handful of books. Resting them onto the table, they spread them out so they could each see one another’s catalogue.

Natsuki: “You really want us to read books like *this* ?”

Kaidou: “I didn’t know you were looking for books like *that* !”

Saiki: “ *Neither of these look interesting at all* .”

Natsuki: “Ugh–!”

Natsuki dropped frustratedly into her seat, leaning back and crossing her arms over her chest.

Natsuki: “I give up! Being a club leader is way too hard! I just wish Monika was here or something… She’d know what to do.”

Yuri: “It’s okay, Natsuki. You don’t have to push yourself into this role. Having the initiative to invite everyone here in the first place is a good first step by itself. I don’t think I’d ever be confident enough to do that…”

Natsuki: “I guess you have a point… But I don’t want this to be a failure on the first try.”

Hayasaka: “Then what did you two do in the literature club?”

Yuri: “Back in the literature club, we’d usually be tasked with writing poems and sharing them with each other. Although, I was never too keen on sharing my own…”

Natsuki: “You can say that again. I wasn’t a huge fan either…”

Kaidou: “But why can’t we do that? I’d like to see your poems!”

Natsuki: “What? No way! I-I don’t wanna be put on the spot!”

Saiki: “ *Then why don’t we just write one together* ?”

Hayasaka: “That…doesn’t sound like a bad idea, actually. I-I mean, it’s our collective fault if it turns out bad in the end, right? Haha.”

Natsuki: “...Alright. It kinda sounds like fun. But we need to think of a theme first or else we’re all just gonna be writing random lines.”

Yuri: “Ah…”

Kaidou: “Um…”

Brian: “...W-What about the beach?”

Natsuki: “Hey, that could work. We’ve written about the beach before, haven’t we Yuri?”

Yuri: “Oh yes, we have. Then I suppose I don’t mind this subject.”

Having mutually agreed on their theme, the group took it in turns writing one line of the poem and passing the sheet around in a circle. This process cycled for a few turns until the poem was deemed ready to come to a close.

Natsuki: “...Let’s just hope it makes sense aloud. So, does anyone wanna try reading it?”

Kaidou: “Oh! I can!”

Yuri: “A-Actually, um, if it’s not too much trouble, perhaps I could try my hand at presenting it…?”

Kaidou nodded and handed her the sheet of paper with a smile. She returned a shaky one, hands unsure on how to hold it for a moment before she composed herself with a deep breath. Yuri’s start was shaky, blurting out a teary apology when she was hit with a voice-crack on the second line alone. But with some support from the group, she gradually began to develop into an elegant tone: bright and confident and steering her way through the poem with admirable ease. And when she had finished and pressed the sheet to the table with a defiance that spoke of her social exhaustion, a round of applause had shocked her to her core, twirling a strand of her purple locks between her fingers and shrinking into her chair.

Natsuki: “Wow…I’m actually kinda shocked at how decent that was. Maybe this book club wasn’t a total waste of time after all.”

Yuri: “T-That’s great–but can we just read now please?”

Natsuki: “Hehe, I guess we can.”

Brian: “Hayasaka, I just have to say that your writing was really nice. Are you a writer in your spare time?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, thank you… But it really wasn’t anything special. I honestly just wrote what came to mind to not hold up the line, haha. Yours was pleasant too, of course.”

Brian: “You really think so? I’m the farthest from the poetic type, but I appreciate it! Ah, I just wish we could be doing this without having to worry about the death game and the new motive…”

Natsuki: “Hey, um, speaking of the motive… I’m still really unnerved about it. Can we really not sleep tonight? Will we really die if we do?”

Yuri: “I-I’m much too afraid to try. I’d rather take my chances and stay awake all night…”

Kaidou: “Same here. Although, I have to admit I’m pretty good at all-nighters, heheh.”

Saiki: “ *You usually fall asleep in the blink of an eye* .”

Kaidou: “Then how about we both keep an eye on each other tonight to make sure we don’t fall asleep?”

Saiki: “ *Night duty with you, huh? Well it’s better than leaving you alone, I guess* …”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I really don’t want you all to be worrying about it too much. Just try to keep your focus on other things, alright?” (“...What I just said wasn’t necessarily a lie – I really don’t want such young people to worry – but me? Ha, I’m still figuring out how exactly I should cope with this…”)

Time flew by as the group indulged in a book or two, but as the sun set for the evening, they decided to wrap up the somewhat successful book club for the time being. Before setting off, Hayasaka swiped a few books to occupy him in his hotel room for the night, seeing as he had to fill the upcoming empty hours that he couldn’t fill with sleep. Turning on his heel, he couldn’t help but overhear a short conversation between the two girls.

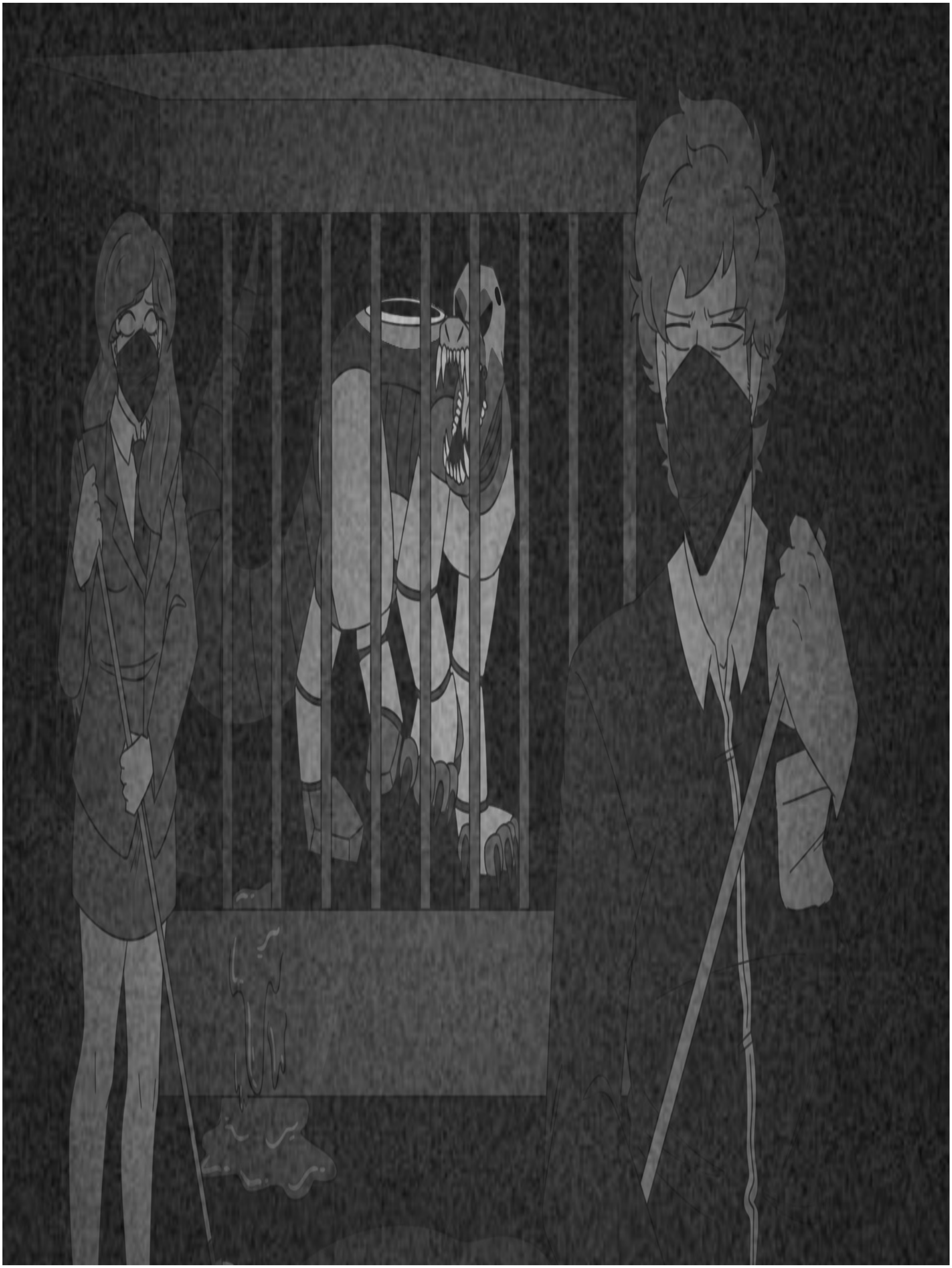
Yuri: “Ah, Natsuki, do you mind if I stay behind for a while? I don’t want to lose my momentum on my book, and the library is just too perfect of a spot to abandon…”

Natsuki: “Well… I mean, I can’t tell you what to do. Just, be careful, alright?”

Yuri: “Of course I will. I’m fully aware of the consequences.”

After being flashed a reassuring smile by Yuri, Natsuki nodded and left, Hayasaka realising he should retire as well. The moment he set foot in his hotel room and laid his load of books on the table, Hayasaka finally conceptualised just how infuriating this night was going to be. Sighing, he took a seat on his bed, cracked open a book, and began to trudge through the long night.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: “Entry seven: two workers and I have been tasked to test the limits on what other kinds of food they can digest other than meat. We’ve gathered that their artificial digestive system reacts to liquids — *especially* alcohol — terribly. These reactions result in violent spasms of vomiting and their aggression levels increasing substantially. During these tests, they attempted to maul us several times when we had to place them in their cage so we could clean up all the vomiting and destruction they made… That was, until one of us resorted to creating a controller to turn them on and off whenever we needed to go into their room.”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning, but don't be late – unless you're already dead.”

The loud announcement had startled Hayasaka out of his dull state, pressing his palms gently into the sockets of his eyes. He wasn’t sure when it had happened, but at one stage during the night he had given up reading, the words on the page fumbling together into a dark splodge of meaningless ideals. He had then opted to stare at the wall, to which everything had led up to this point in time. Heaving himself off the bed, he readied himself and left for the restaurant, contemplating whether or not it was too early to pump an extra shot into his coffee.

Entering the restaurant, his eyes locked onto a certain someone leaning against the bar with his large shoulders hunched stiffly. Troubled at the sight, he walked over to him.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, are you alright…?”

Kurumada: “Wha? Yeah, yeah, jus’um…God, I’m so fuckin’ tired, and it’s just the first day of this shit. It’s pissing me the hell off.”

Hayasaka: “What did you do last night exactly…?”

Kurumada: “Just hit the gym, per usual.”

Hayasaka: “Wh–Kurumada! T-That’s a huge detriment to your energy! You should be more mindful of conserving it…! Come with me – I’ll make you a coffee.”

A new wave of adrenaline hit Hayasaka's nerves as he ushered Kurumada over to the kitchen. To his dismay, he only heard the other chuckle in return.

Kurumada: "Aw, you're that worried for me, eh? You're practically takin' care of me now."

Hayasaka: "I–T-That's not–I'm obviously worried about you…! Especially if you're going to be this careless when you could die if you can't keep yourself awake…"

Once finished brewing the drinks, Hayasaka maintained a firm look as he handed a mug to Kurumada.

Hayasaka: "Look, just… Occupy yourself with activities that won't tire you out next time, okay?"

Kurumada: "...'Guess you got a point there."

But Hayasaka knew it wasn't as simple as that; when the two walked back out into the restaurant, it was clear on everyone else's faces that the effects of the all-nighter had drained them all to some degree.

Natsuki: "...Ugh, why couldn't the motive be anything else?"

L: "That isn't the wisest of thoughts. That leaves the motive open for something potentially worse than this."

Latte: "How do you appear to be managing so well, L?"

L: "I suppose that's due to the fact that I didn't really sleep prior to this, regardless. It's unfortunate the rest of you work a little differently."

Ena: “But not me, good sir! I am most full of energy today! But everyone else looks so tired… Now I feel all squelchy that I cannot relate!”

Moony: “Don’t let me touch you then, jello-legs.”

Mai: “Aha! Good morning, you two~!”

Hayasaka: “M-Mai? You’re awfully energetic…”

Kurumada: “A little too energetic. How the hell are ya not tired?”

Mai: “Let’s just say I have my own way of keeping myself awake, hehe… Ah, but don’t fret! I’m actually trying to think of a plan to cheer people up!”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah, and what’s that?”

Mai: “Ah, ah! It’s a secret for now.”

Hayasaka: (“Hopefully it’s something not too exhausting for our own sakes…”)

As no one had offered to strike up the morning meeting, most assumed it was free game to split off to do their own bidding. With the free time on his hands, and no plans for the day, Hayasaka made up his mind to find someone to talk to.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Kaidou at the park.

Kaidou: “I wonder who’s behind this death game… Ah! Could it be?! Dark Reunion!”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Kaidou. Would you like to talk for a while?”

Kaidou: “Mr. Hayasaka! You dare talk to the Jet Black Wings?! You must have courage of steel!”

Hayasaka spent some time with Kaidou. Unsure what to give him, he decided to gift him some spare bandages.

Kaidou: “Hehe, I see you are attempting to aid me in my battle against Dark Reunion, right?”

Hayasaka: “U-Um, if you want…?” (“But, I’m glad to see he liked it.”)

Kaidou: “Mr. Hayasaka! You must be risking your life right now if you want to talk with me!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I am? And why is that…?”

Kaidou: “Because I, the Jet Black Wings, am a vulnerable target of Dark Reunion, and the day they appear to take me down, you may be hurt by my immense power when I’m forced to unveil my bandages!”

Hayasaka: (“Kaidou is very… *passionate* about his roleplay. But, he’s young, and I really shouldn’t attempt to ruin his fun, right?”) “Speaking of Dark Reunion, what exactly is it?”

Kaidou: “Ah, of course. A mere civilian like you would know nothing about Dark Reunion. But, hm, what can I reveal to you that won’t end you up on their wanted list… Heh. You see, Dark Reunion is an evil organisation, however little is known about them: not who they are nor where they are located. They’re always lurking in the shadows, therefore I’ve taken it upon myself to make sure no one here is a potential member!”

Hayasaka: (“H-How does he plan to do that exactly?”) “In that case, if they’re such a secret organisation, then why do *you* know about them?”

Kaidou: “You see, the Jet Black Wings was once an assassin for Dark Reunion…But! They went rogue once they found out their plans to take over mankind. And when they were caught by Dark Reunion, they performed a special technique known as ‘Phantom’ to split their soul from their body and escape… The soul ended up taking over the vessel known as Shun Kaidou, while only in his mother’s womb!”

Hayasaka: (“T-That’s… Quite the elaborate backstory. He has it all figured out, as well…”)

Kaidou: “Heh, I take it your silence is a sign of how impressed you are, Mr. Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “I-If you want to call it that…?”

Kaidou: “You wouldn’t be the first: many people are interested in my power. You see, one of my fellow classmates held a secret club where he was to help me regain my memories of my past life. However, he was unfortunately thwarted by Dark Reunion after only the first meeting!”

Hayasaka: (“I hope he means ‘called off’ instead of actually being attacked…”)

Kaidou: “I still never got my old wallet back from him, either. Even though he did say it was to help keep up the barrier…”

Hayasaka: (“He did what now…? I really don’t think this classmate of his had good intentions…”)

Kaidou: “Ah! I can feel it! T-The presence of Dark Reunion creeping up around us! I’ll need to make a barrier to protect us! Quick, Mr. Hayasaka, flee while you still can!”

Hayasaka: “O-Okay…” (“I guess that means our conversation is over, h-huh?”)

The two parted ways after a little while. Seeing as he had more time left in the day, Hayasaka scouted for someone new to talk with.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found L in his hotel room.

L: “This island holds so many mysteries… I’m uncertain why no one else seems to want to figure them out.”

Hayasaka: “Hello, L. Would you like to talk for a little while?”

L: “...Perhaps I can put my investigation on hold for a little while. I am getting somewhat parched.”

Hayasaka spent some time with L. Unsure what he would like, he gifted him a small box of a fluffy cake slice.

L: “How delicious. How did you know I loved cake, Hayasaka? You haven’t been stalking my eating habits, have you now?”

Hayasaka: “N-No! I just thought it would make for a nice present…?”

L: “A present, you say? Well, in that case, I’d like you to bring more presents similar to this in the future.”

Hayasaka: (“I think he likes it? Thank goodness, haha…”)

L: “So then, Hayasaka, let’s cut to the chase. Why have you decided to initiate a conversation with me?”

Hayasaka: “Um, what do you mean by that? I just… wanted to get to know you, that’s all.”

L: “Hm, I wonder… are you attempting to learn my weaknesses for when or if you plan to kill me?”

Hayasaka: “What–n-no! I never intended to do such a thing! D-Did I really come off that way…?”

L: “I was simply joking. I can infer that you are not the strongest candidate for a murderer. As well as that, I am not as weak as I may appear.”

Hayasaka: (“Ouch… Then again, he’s not incorrect, is he now? Haha…”) “So, L, I remember you previously mentioned before about a murder case you’re currently investigating. What was it again?”

L: “The Kira case is actually a very secretive case, you see. I only disclosed it at the time to deter you and your friends from questioning me any further during our initial introduction.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? I suppose if it’s a secret, then nothing can be said. T-That’s okay…”

L: “Then again… Perhaps I can leak certain pieces of information. At least what’s already available to public knowledge, that is.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…?”

L: “The Kira case is a series of connected murders all conducted by a single unknown serial killer, who was dubbed as ‘Kira’ by online forums. Kira murders convicted criminals, doing so by causing them to experience a heart attack.”

Hayasaka: “O-Oh my… How is that even possible?”

L: “While it took me quite a while to figure this factor out, I cannot reveal this information to you.”

Hayasaka: “That’s understandable. Whatever it is, it must be awfully insane, haha…”

L: “Indeed…”

Hayasaka: “So, do you suspect anyone of being Kira, since you have the method already figured out?”

L: “There’s only one individual I’ve ever suspected, but there's only a 5% chance of them truly behind Kira’s identity.”

Hayasaka: “T-That low?”

L: “My suspicions are never wrong, Hayasaka. That I can definitely disclose to you in confidence.”

Hayasaka: “I see…” (“L makes himself out to be the perfect detective, doesn’t he? His ultimate title fits almost too well, haha…”)

Undergoing social fatigue, Hayasaka considered it was best that he lay off of conversations for a while, opting to take a light stroll around the first island. Cornering the park as the first strokes of wine-purple hit the apricot sky, an oncoming figure approached his path.

Hayasaka: “Retsuko? Where’re you going? It’s getting a little late…”

Retsuko: “Just the usual rendezvous at the stage bar with Bojack, haha.”

Hayasaka: “...God, um, Retsuko, I-I don’t mean to be rude, but you really should stop all this drinking…”

Retsuko: “Is this to do with what happened with Jesse? I feel horrible for laughing at him, but I was just so wasted I didn’t know what I was thinking. Should I bring it up with Bojack?”

Hayasaka: “Um, no, it’s less to do with that and more so, well, your health and safety. It would be dangerous if you forgot about the motive under the influence…”

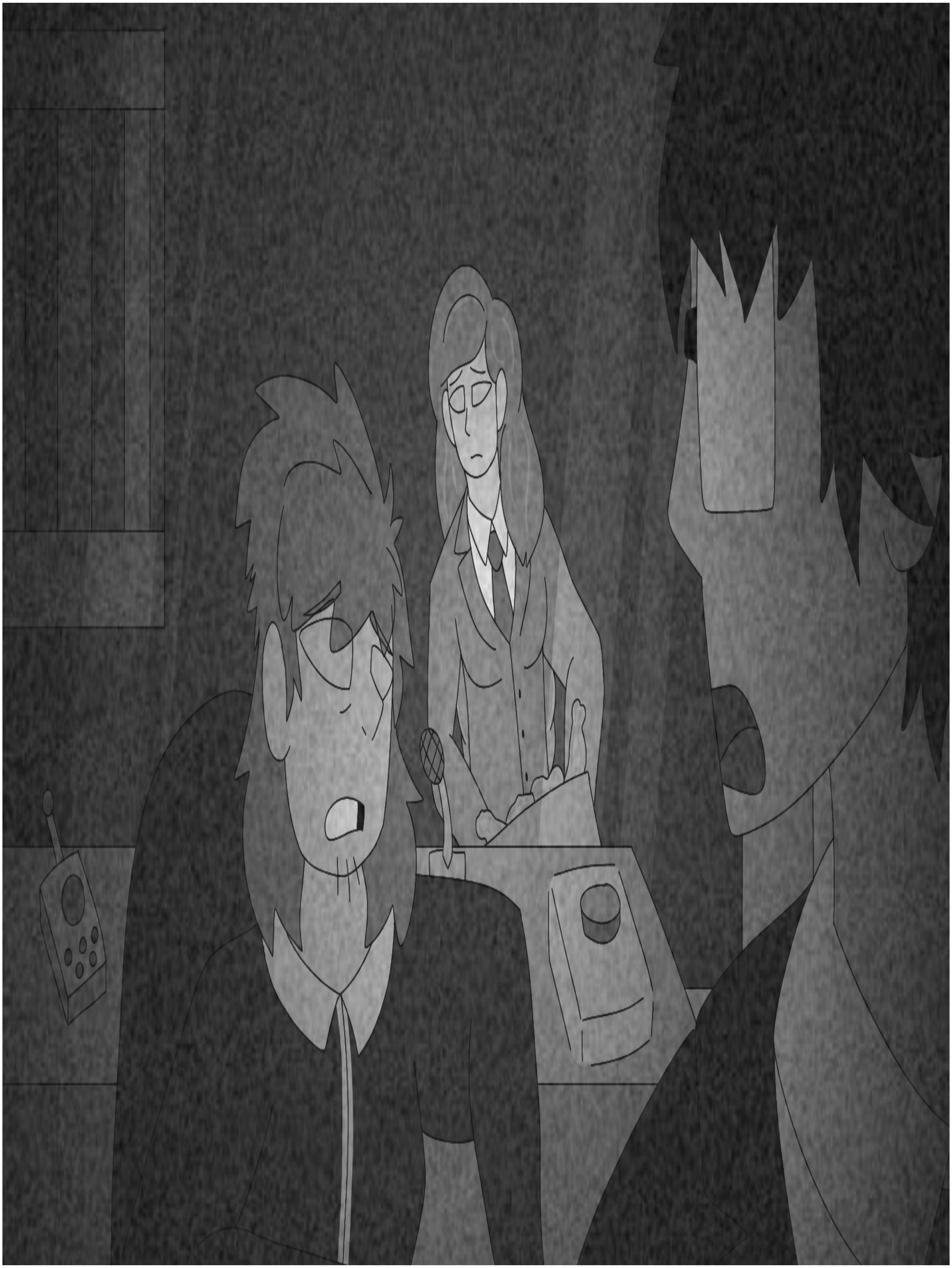
Retsuko: “Oh, I see… Y-Yeah, I get where you’re coming from. I promise to cut down, anyway. I want to focus my time on other things.”

Hayasaka: “I-I can’t tell you what to do – your choices are your own after all. But, I’m glad to hear that.” (“Although, what does she mean by ‘other things’? …I suppose it’s none of my business.”)

Retsuko offered a reassuring smile and Hayasaka could tell her gratitude was sincere. Parting their opposite ways, Hayasaka returned to the hotel to get a head-start on reading (or more or less a head-start on another coffee). He felt his eyelids droop heavily from time to time, but strived to lock his focus onto the finely-printed words on the page.

Hayasaka: (“I just need to keep my focus… I can’t lose my grip on reality so soon, can I…? But, just how long can we all go without sleeping before someone…? N-No, Hayasaka, just press on…”)

-MONOTORA FILES-



???#1: “Entry eight: the voice box has been constructed and we’ve implemented it to the throat. We’ll start testing immediately. I’ve asked a friend to be in the same room as them, but for safety precautions we’re locking the thing up. What she will do is repeat the word ‘meat’ whilst showing the piece of meat to them and when they do speak, she will reward them with that piece of meat. Kinda like training a pet — except we have this aggressive robot to train.”

???#2: “You think she can handle the thing? They seem to eye her a lot whenever she goes into the room.”

???#1: “They’re in their cage, so she should be alright. We’ll shut them off with the remote if they get too riled up or if they don’t respond correctly.”

???#2: “Fine, let’s start the test then.”

…

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Rise and shine to another day at your new job! Better hop to whatever you do in the morning…”

Hayasaka’s ears could barely process the latter half of the announcement while zoned-out on his bed, limbs hung so heavy as if he was sinking into the mattress foam. To an onlooker, they would’ve mistaken him for ‘half-dead’. Maybe he really was; he was only a blink away from snapping his eyes shut for the inevitable.

Hayasaka: (“I have to go…”)

Encapsulating the only thought to surface his mind that didn’t pester him for rest, he pushed his body off of the bed. The restaurant was worryingly deserted as he arrived, an uneasiness infusing in his core. Regardless, he recognised mulling over such a thing would only tire him out further, and so continued on towards the kitchen.

His knees almost gave out when he made it to the doorway.

Hayasaka: ("B…Brian?")

Barely a few metres away stood Brian, body half-turned from the doorframe. His body rocked faintly as his hunched shoulders dipped lower and lower onto the countertop where a mug rested between pale fingers. Despite his obscured position, Hayasaka could clearly watch his eyes begin to waver shut.

And his eyes were closed.

And his eyes were closed?

Hayasaka: "B-Brian–!"

Brian: "H-Hah…!"

Hayasaka hadn't fully processed what was happening until he was right next to Brian shouting him awake in a cold sweat, as if his mind had lagged behind his own body. He promptly removed the tremulous hand that had previously shaken Brian's arm with a snappy retraction. And as the hype drained away, all Hayasaka could do was let out a shaky breath as Brian stared at him with wide, lost eyes.

Brian: "H…Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: "T-Thank goodness I caught you just in time… Any sooner and you could've, ah…"

Brian: "Wait–was I really about to fall asleep just then? I-I could've just *died* …? Oh god… T-Thank you so much for waking me up!"

Hayasaka: ("When he says it out loud, I can't help but feel worse if I wasn't here in time…")

Brian: “I just… I don’t know how long I can go on without sleep, if what happened back there didn’t clue me in enough. I really don’t want to die over this…”

Hayasaka: “If only there was a way to prevent all this from happening, huh? Haha…”

Hayasaka saw Brian’s lip thin as he trailed his eyes down to his coffee mug for some time.

Brian: “...Hey, Hayasaka. Do you want to have another coffee with me?”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Well, I have no want to deny…”

Brian nodded and moved to turn the coffee machine on. At one point, someone had walked into the kitchen whilst the two were occupied in a light chat, Hayasaka peering over out of curiosity to see who it was.

Yuri: “Ah… U-Um, are you two using the kitchen currently…?”

Brian: “No, not really? We’re just talking.”

Yuri: “Oh, I see. Then don’t mind me – I’m just going to make myself some tea.”

Yuri sped over to the kettle so as not to interrupt the two. Hayasaka opted to leave her to it, seeing as she already appeared startled out of her mind, and turned back to Brian.

Hayasaka: “So, Brian, what did you exactly do to be called the Ultimate Witch Hunter? I must say, it’s an interesting talent to be bestowed with, haha…”

Brian: “Mm, well I’m not sure where to start, since it’s a bit of a long story. But, when I was hired by this company, Sintracorp, I had to do all sorts of crazy things in order to kill the witch. I had a few run-ins here and there, such as with a giant spider-like creature and a rogue printer-hand fusion…”

Hayasaka: “G-Goodness…”

Brian: “...M-Maybe that was a little too casually-spoken, especially since you don’t even know what I’m talking about.”

Hayasaka: “Regardless, it sounds frightening…”

Brian: “It was horrifying. And the weirdest part was how everyone at the company never second-guessed or questioned anything. It honestly made me feel a little alienated… I’m just happy I managed to do it all in one day.”

Hayasaka: (“ *One day* ? That’s probably the most surprising part about all that…”)

Just when the conversation had begun to lose its momentum, a new figure popped their head into the kitchen doorway.

Mai: “Ah! There you are, Yuri!”

Yuri: “H-Huh?”

Yuri flinched so swiftly that she almost dropped the teacup she had just picked up. Hayasaka idly listened in as Mai sauntered over to her.

Mai: “You are just the girl I wanted to find!”

Yuri: “Why so…? Is there something you need from me?”

Mai: “Hehe, there’s no need to be scared. I’m just here to invite you to a little girls-outing! I’m thinking we should all go do some karaoke at noon tomorrow, hm? What do you say?”

Yuri: “Um, t-that is… It’s kind and all, but I’m not really interested in singing, let alone confident in performing in front of other people…”

Mai: “Aw, but please~?”

Mai clasped her hands together and leant further towards Yuri, who in return backed up a little into the countertop.

Mai: “Natsuki said that she’ll go if you do!”

Yuri: “She did…? Then… Perhaps I’ll think about it.”

Mai: “I’m taking that as a yes!”

Hayasaka: “I see… That must’ve been what you said you were planning yesterday…”

Mai: “Oh, maybe you could plan something for all the guys to do, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’d rather not…”

Mai: “Hehe, I’m only teasing!”

Hayasaka shook his head involuntarily at Mai’s jab. The morning passed by quicker than he expected, and he split off from Brian once the two had finished their coffees.

Hayasaka: (“A whole day without much to do again… I’ll go find someone to talk to, shall I?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Bojack at the stage bar.

Bojack: “Shit. I’m almost out of booze.”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Bojack. Um, would you like to… talk?”

Bojack: “Talk? About what? Oh, you mean like have a conversation? Sure. I have nothing better to do.”

Hayasaka spent some time with Bojack. Assuming he would like it, Hayasaka gifted him a golden globe replica.

Bojack: “Oh shit. Is this mine?”

Hayasaka: “N-No? It’s a present I got from the machine in the hotel lobby. I don’t even think it’s real…”

Bojack: “Huh. Still, I think I’ll keep a hold of this. Won’t hurt if I tell people it *is* mine, right? I mean, who’s going to say it’s not?”

Hayasaka: (“Is he going to keep holding it in his hand? Ah, regardless, I’m glad he likes it.”)

Bojack: “You know, you should be flattered you decided to talk to *the* Bojack Horseman out of everyone else.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Why’s that?”

Bojack: “Don’t you have a bunch of questions to ask a famous celebrity actor, such as myself? It’s not often you get to for free. So you better be grateful. But I always want to answer people’s questions about me, anyway.”

Hayasaka: (“...He remembers that I haven’t actually heard of him before, right?”) “Well… you mentioned before about that show you were on, right? Maybe you could start with that?”

Bojack: “Yeah – Horsin’ Around. I starred, obviously, as ‘The Horse’.”

Hayasaka: (“It didn’t have a proper name? Just ‘The Horse’?”)

Bojack: “It was basically about a horse, being me, who raised three orphans. We got into crazy twenty-two minute shenanigans and hijinks. Like this one time where Sabrina, Sara Lynn, caused quite a commotion in the mall. I think that one got good ratings. Probably due to my performance, as usual.”

Hayasaka: “That plot formula… It wasn’t a sitcom, by any chance?”

Bojack: “What? Are you demeaning me for starring in a sitcom? I’ll have you know I’ve also starred in a gritty movie and currently starring in a gritty TV show.”

Hayasaka: “N-No, why would I be demeaning you? Um, so, what made you want to act on such a show in the first place?”

Bojack: “My friend, Herb Kazzaz: the one who created the show. He was the one to give me my first television debut. We started out in standup, hoping one day we made it big. And we did. Obviously. Maybe you and Herb would’ve gotten along, considering he was also…”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Bojack: “Uh, nevermind.”

Hayasaka: “...Well, i-it’s nice that you two got so far.”

Bojack: “About that. I backstabbed him during the show’s airing. Completely ruined his career. He died from cancer hating me. Well it wasn’t the cancer. It was an allergic reaction to peanuts. But you get the idea.”

Hayasaka: “O-Oh…”

Bojack: “...Uh, sorry. For downing the mood. Want a drink?”

Hayasaka: “N-No thank you…”

Bojack: “Oh, okay. Uh. S’pose I’ll just drink away this awkward encounter myself then.”

Hayasaka: “...You do that.” (“I guess this means we should stop speaking now.”)

The two parted ways a short time after.

Hayasaka: (“A little past noon… It won’t hurt to find someone else to talk to, right?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Jesse at the beach.

Jesse: “This island’s too damn hot, yo…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Jesse. Would you… like to talk for a while?”

Jesse: “Aw, hell yeah – I got lots of shit to talk about. Where’d you wanna start?”

Hayasaka spent some time with Jesse. Uncertain, but currently owning such a present anyhow, he gifted Jesse a spare beanie.

Jesse: “Sick drip, yo.”

Hayasaka: (“Drip? What is that…? Oh well, at least he liked it, haha…”)

Jesse: “So, uh, what made you wanna talk to someone like me?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Why not?”

Jesse: “I dunno, it’s just… We’re like completely different people, y’know? I thought you’d be mingling with the more formal folks in your spare time.”

Hayasaka: “I mean, we are the same age, aren’t we? It’s not like we’d have zero in common, r-right? Haha…”

Jesse: “Guess so. Then did you have somethin’ in mind you wanted to talk about?”

Hayasaka: “Well… Ah, um, how did you earn the title of the Ultimate Woodworker?”

Jesse: “I guess it started in highschool. I wasn’t the best student, y’know, more like a total screw-up. So naturally I choose classes that I can go in, do the assignment, and flunk the rest of ‘em. But there was this one woodworking class, yeah, that assigned this wooden box we had to make. When I handed mine in pretty early on in the semester, the teacher asked me if this was the best I could do. And I thought to myself… *no* . N’ so, I tried again. And again. Five remakes. I’d spend fuckin’ hours on end perfecting this box. Like, sandin’ it n’ shit. It was perfect when I finished. It… it was one of the first things I felt proud of doin’ that wasn’t shit on by my teachers and parents.”

Hayasaka: “Wow, that’s… impressive, Jesse.” (“And yet, I wonder what he did to make them act that way…”)

Jesse: “...I haven’t actually, like, woodworked? Is that the word for it? I dunno. Anyway, I haven’t done it since highschool really. But I think I’m still pretty sharp at it.”

Hayasaka: “That’s a little odd how you’d be given such a title, in that case.”

Jesse: “Guess the company did some mega diggin’ to find this shit out. But, like, y’know, I’ve been busy doin’, uh, other stuff, so it’s not like I could really find the time to do it or whatever.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder what this ‘other stuff’ is…”)

Jesse: “Wait, so like, I don’t actually recall you tellin’ me your talent last time. What is it?”

Hayasaka: “M-My talent? Ah, well… I-It’s the Ultimate Office Worker–and before you say, I know it’s a silly talent, I know, haha…”

Jesse: “...Nah, that’s–that’s like a really respectable talent.”

Hayasaka: “What? R-Really?”

Jesse: “Yeah. Kinda wished I had a job like that honestly.”

Hayasaka: (“So what exactly does Jesse do currently? I’m a little concerned if he really desires such a job like mine…”)

Jesse: “Oh yeah, ‘cuz you’re like Japanese, I bet you live a formal life, eatin’ fine cuisine n’ shit.”

Hayasaka: “Formal life…? Haha, hardly. I can only really afford basic meals with my salary.”

Jesse: “Damn. Well, at least that’s enough for a meal at Denny’s, right?”

Hayasaka: “D… *Denny’s* ? What’s that?”

Jesse: “What?! You’re tellin’ me they don’t got a Denny’s in Japan?”

Hayasaka: “N-No…?”

Jesse: “ *Shit* . I’m tellin’ you, man, you seriously need some greasy comfort food in your life. Trust me.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I’ll… think about it?” (“Well, if not a little left-field back there, I’m now a little confused how Jesse views me as an American…”)

Time passed by at a standstill as Hayasaka remained determined to keep himself engaged with some sort of activity as to not allow his body the comfort of any shut-eye. His options were becoming even less open the more he denied certain hobbies out of the fear they’d steal too much of his energy away.

Hayasaka: (“What to do… What else is there left to do that won’t kill me…?”)

DING DONG, BING BONG

Hayasaka: “W-Wha…?”

Monotora: “Attention all co-workers – y’all still kickin’? If so, come to the park right away for a special announcement. And don’t be a slacker, or else you’ll be askin’ for a real nasty punishment, kehe…”

Hayasaka gulped down whatever was left in his dry mouth as the nearby monitor switched itself back to black. No options had to be weighed as he began his trek towards the park, disorientated if what he heard was simply a figment of his imagination. Meeting up with the rest of the group among the snake statues once more, he got a good look over just how drained everyone else had become: bags under eyes, postures slouched and unkept, some even appearing as if they wanted to lie down on the cobblestone. All of it only piled atop of the layers of anxiety he had been holding onto on how everything would play out in the end.

Monotora: “My, my! Looks like you all are gonna pass out at any second now! I don’t mind if you really wanna, heheh!”

L: “And why have you requested our presence like this a second time?”

Monotora: “Y’see, we’re awfully surprised at how resistant you all have been to the motive so far – I would’ve sworn at least *someone* would’a caved in and killed by now! Maybe we gave ya too much leeway with the caffeine supply, eh? At this rate, there’s a higher chance most of ya will die from fallin’ asleep rather than a murder. And so, to counteract this, Nesos will be providin’ you all an extra motive on top of the first to get things back on track – before half of ya die from forced passing-out, kehe!”

Mai: “And what is this extra motive?”

Monotora: “If the next killer successfully gets away with their murder – that bein’ surviving the class trial without being caught – you’ll be permitted to take a plus one of your choice with ya off the island, while the rest are ripped limb by limb as per the rules.”

Brian: “Huh? How’s that supposed to help a murder occur…?”

Monotora: “Kehehe! With the driving motivation that you’ll be able to save another person’s life alongside your own just by gettin’ your hands a little bloody, it’s sure to push those who have been ‘strengthening bonds’ or whatever! Whether a murder occurs or you all die in your sleep, one way or another, someone will die very, very soon…!”

Following Monotora’s departure, Hayasaka could barely react to all the information thrown at him in such a short amount of time.

Hayasaka: ("A second motive…? They really would go so low, wouldn't they?")

Kurumada: "What the hell? That's a damn ridiculous motive! It's still selfish saving only yourself and another person over the rest of us."

Natsuki: "Who cares about that? We have way more pressing issues at hand here, like the fact that I can't keep going without sleep for much longer! I can't do this – I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die here to this stupid motive!"

Latte: "Calm yourself, Natsuki. You need to stay strong for as long as you can, alright?"

Jesse: "And how long'll that be…?"

Latte: "T-That is…"

Natsuki: "...Hey, Kaidou. Do you have any ideas?"

Kaidou: "...H-Huh? Um…"

Kaidou only managed to shrug his shoulders, vigour depleted for anything more.

Kaidou: "I… I don't know what to do at this point."

Saiki: " *Then give up and focus on keeping yourself awake. That's what's more important* ."

Kaidou: "..."

Bojack: "Well, it was nice knowing you all. I'm gonna go drink my sorrows away now."

Retsuko: “That makes two of us.”

Mai: “Are you sure about that, Retsuko? What about our karaoke tomorrow? All this drinking you’re doing can’t possibly be safe.”

Retsuko: “I’ll be fine, I promise. People just have… different ways of coping with things, I guess. Even if you may not agree with them. But don’t worry: this’ll be my last drink. And Bojack’s, right?”

Bojack: “Wait, why do you have to drag *me* into this?”

Retsuko: “Because I’m worried for your safety as well, you know. You drink way more than I usually do, anyhow.”

Bojack: “...”

L: “I wonder who’ll make it through the night for tomorrow…”

Ena: “Everyone, I believe!”

Hayasaka: (“What wishful thinking…”)

Despite everything, the group had no other choice but to go their separate ways in the end. Just like the previous nights, Hayasaka returned to his hotel room to continue through his small book collection. Neglecting to even care what book anymore, he picked one up at random with his weary grip and flipped open to a random page.

…

Hayasaka didn’t know what time it was. He could’ve sworn the nighttime announcement had already been recited a few hours ago, but he wasn’t sure anymore. Nothing was starting to make sense anymore, and a lot of things around him had startled to lose their edge, their focus, their existence. His room was void of any light: no windows, no lamp on, just the dim outline of the room's furniture that faded in and out the more he tried to focus on anything in particular. Tall shadows began to grow and shape around the walls, darkening his vision as they stretched all around him, as if to trap him in a chokehold of blindness.

Hayasaka: ("I-It's so hard… to keep my eyes on anything anymore… If I read another word, I think I'm going to throw up… Everything in my room looks so boring, so dark… I just want this to end… Everyone's suffering… Kurumada and Mai are suffering… I'm suffering… Why? Why do things have to end this way?")

…

Hayasaka: ("...Why *can't* things end this way? Why can't I just… close my eyes? Ah, that's it. Why don't I just close my eyes for a moment? That's not sleeping is it? Simply closing my eyes? Why… Why didn't I think of that sooner? Haha, that's it… I'll close my eyes – only for a second – and I'll be fine… Just a few seconds, I'll be fine… I'll be… …")

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Hayasaka: "Ah–!"

Hayasaka's eyes snapped wide open as he shot his head towards his door. The shock sobered him up enough to allow him to dread what was just about to occur.

Hayasaka: ("I… almost fell asleep. I almost succumbed to sleep and *died* . Whoever just knocked on my door, I owe you my life…")

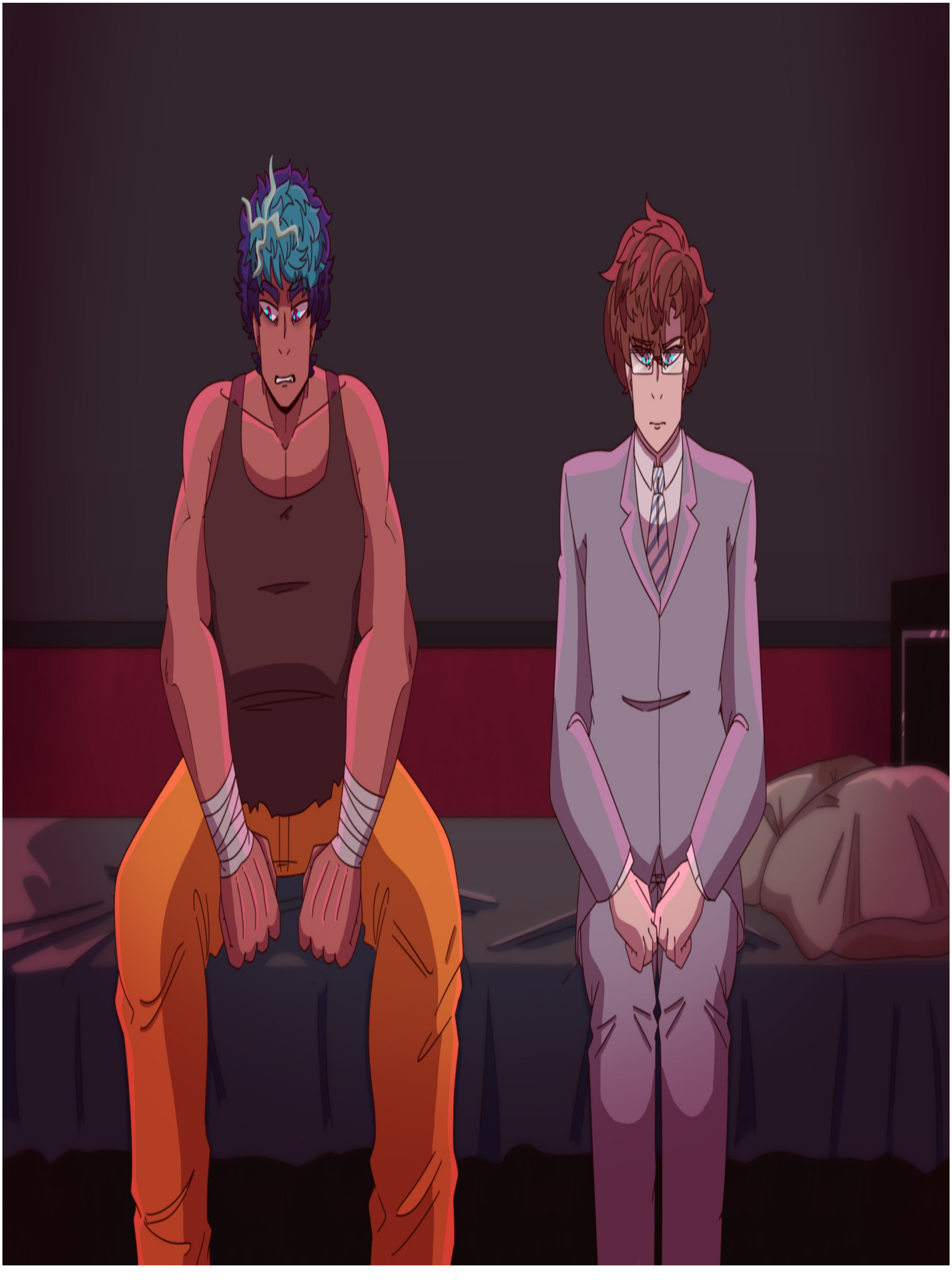
Getting up to answer the door, Hayasaka almost stood there in awe over who it was.

Hayasaka: "K…Kurumada?"

Kurumada: "Hey. Mind if I come in?"

Hayasaka: “U-Um, ah, not at all…”

Hayasaka stepped aside to allow Kurumada into his room before shutting the door with a gentle click. Kurumada took the initiative to seat himself on the edge of his bed, torso hunched forward as he balled his hands between his spread thighs. Hayasaka followed, perching his hands atop his tightly packed legs.



Kurumada: “...Argh, I just–I just can’t do this no more! I can’t find shit to do without my mind screamin’ at me for sleep!”

Hayasaka: “It’s the same for me… There’s been too many close calls where I’m on the brink of passing out. And at this point, I just don’t think coffee will do it for me anymore…”

Kurumada: “Damnit…”

Hayasaka: “I-I know I can’t keep this up any longer, and in a day or two, I know I’m going to fall asleep. B-But I… I don’t want to die…”

Kurumada then turned his body towards Hayasaka, his face stern.

Kurumada: “I’d never forgive myself if you did.”

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry, Kurumada, it’s just… I-I’m weak, and I don’t have much I can do to prevent the inevitable.”

Kurumada: “What if we were to, I dunno, look into some drugs from the pharmacy? See if any’ll give us an extra boost?”

Hayasaka: “N-No, we can’t…we can’t do that. Meddling with medicines – it isn’t safe to do.”

Kurumada: “Well it ain’t like our current situation is any safer. I wouldn’t be suggestin’ such a thing if we weren’t at our last resort.”

Hayasaka: “...”

From the lack of further comment from Hayasaka, Kurumada turned back and ran a palm through his hair.

Kurumada: “...Mai’s still goin’ through with her ‘girls-day’ thing tomorrow.”

Hayasaka: “She is? Who’s going…?”

Kurumada: “I think all the girls, plus Ena. Is Ena a girl? I dunno… But, what’s she s’posed to do if one ends up dead the next day from passin’ out? She kept denyin’ the possibility when I spoke to her ‘bout it…”

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps Mai wishes to stay optimistic despite all else… But is it even truly safe to do karaoke anymore either? Singing can be rather draining as well…”)

Kurumada: “...Damnit! Damnit all to hell! I’m pissed off with these sick motives from this company already! I’ll do anything to kick their asses right fuckin’ now!”

Hayasaka: “C-Calm down…! You shouldn’t think so irrationally in such a drowsy state…”

Kurumada: “...Sorry, s’just… *fuck* …”

Silence lingered around the room. Kurumada crumpled a fistful of the bedsheet in a crude attempt to control his nerves.

Kurumada: “...Well, if I’m gonna die here, at least I’ll be here with you…”

Hayasaka couldn’t help but let his eyes widen at the comment muttered by Kurumada.

Hayasaka: “I… believe the same.”

Kurumada: “Wha–?! What the hell are ya sayin’, Hayasaka? I didn’t mean that for real–it was just a stupid thought!”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, um, I-I’m sorry…”

Kurumada: “...S’fine. You’re just tired–no, we’re *both* tired. Too tired to think properly…”

Kurumada then chuckled weakly.

Kurumada: “Heheh, now I’m kinda concerned with leavin’ ya alone in case ya do fall asleep.”

Hayasaka: “I won’t. Especially after this talk with you.”

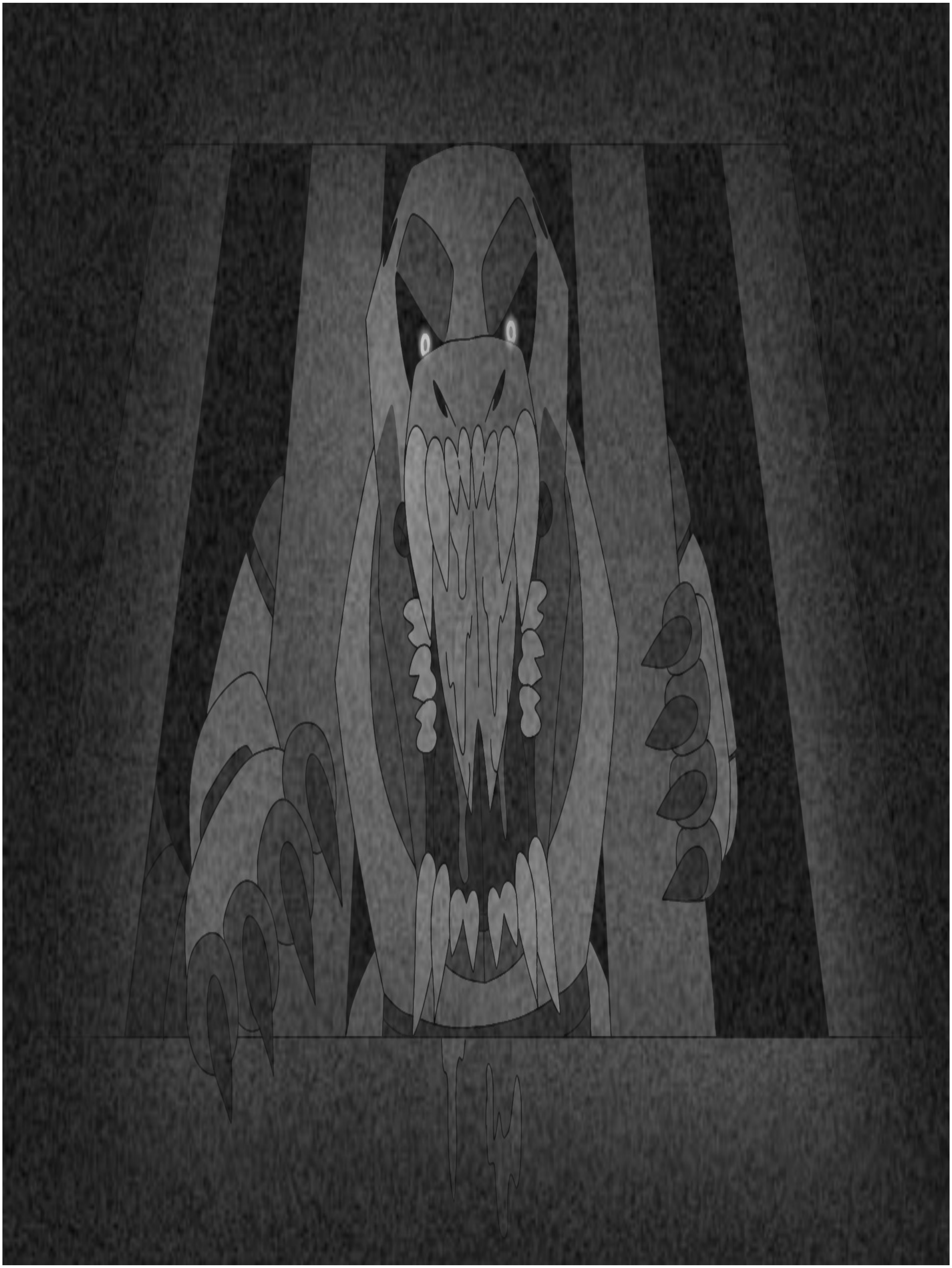
Kurumada nodded, pushing himself off of the bed and lightening the weight Hayasaka had once felt beside him.

Kurumada: “I’m gonna get some air then. Don’t miss me too much, yeah? Heh…”

Kurumada excused himself out of Hayasaka’s room, and once again he was all alone. He let his eyes land on a nearby book in arms reach, retrieved it into his hands and opened to a page.

He’d have to continue on no matter what.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???#1: “...Meat.”

???#2: “M…”

???#1: “C’mon—“

???#2: “Meat...MEAT! MEAT!!”

???#1: “SHIT—“

SLASH

???#1: “TURN THEM OFF! TURN THEM—“

???#3: “I turned them off! Are you hurt?! They didn’t get you did they?!”

???#1: "N-No… I'm fine."

???#3: "Thank god… Just come back inside, we can do this again another time."

???#4: “...Well we know that the voice box works. Guess I'll have to leave and let the boss know about the progress since he's been pestering us about the voice box a lot lately… I'll see you two later."

???#3: "..."

DING DONG, BING BONG

This time, any and all sound emitted from the speakers was a pure blur of static when it reached Hayasaka's ears. He wavered, feeling his body hoist itself off the bed. He allowed whatever energy was remaining in his legs to carry him to the restaurant to make himself yet another coffee, this time an more excessive amount of shots than what could be considered healthy. Disregarding who was even there or not, Hayasaka leant against the counter in the hopes he could just keep himself afloat.

???: "Hayasaka…"

Gradually, he twisted his body around. It was Brian, and he echoed Hayasaka's appearance worryingly well. The only difference was that he held a furrowed brow, eyes glimmered with all the determination he could muster as he stepped closer to Hayasaka.

Brian: "Hayasaka, I want you to come to the library with me. I think we could find something useful if we turned the place inside out. I know it's a stretch, but we just have to try."

Hayasaka: "Ah… What if…What if we went to the pharmacy first? To… give ourselves an extra boost, haha…"

Brian: "Huh? What're you talking about, Hayasaka? Y-You shouldn't be thinking like that!"

Hayasaka: "I…–U-Um, I don't–I don't know what I'm saying, Brian. I'm sorry, ignore me. I can't think straight at all… But what you said about the library, it sounds like a good idea. Hopefully it's worth it…"

Brushing aside the previous hiccup, Hayasaka and Brian slowly but surely ventured over to the second island. However, just as they were about to take the left path towards the library, *it* happened.

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "Well would ya look at that, a fresh piece of prey has been found! Well to you all, who've never eaten a single human before in your lives, it's just a dead body to you. As this event has been triggered, you all have a certain amount of time to gather up as much evidence as possible before the executive trial! Make your way to the karaoke bar, but watch your eyes though, ‘cuz this one ain't pretty. Well, unless you're some creep who's into dead bodies or something.”

Hayasaka: “H… *Huh* ?” (“Did they just say the karaoke bar? But, that’s where…”)

Brian: “N-No… This can’t be real…”

Hayasaka: “...That’s where the girls were planning to meet today."

Brian: “They were…?!”

Hayasaka: “W-We need to go…”

As soon as the words had left his dry mouth, Hayasaka had picked up his pace into a frantic speed-walk, and eventually the two were practically racing each other to the karaoke bar with a newfound surge of energy. Bursting into the lobby, Hayasaka whipped his head around every which way in the hope’s of something to clue him on where he should be going next, but a part of him didn’t want to find out at all.

Hayasaka: (“Please… Please don’t let it be Mai. I-It can’t be Mai, can it? N-No, no… Oh god no please don’t let it be her…”)

While his mind tripped over itself in hysteria, Brian had tapped him on the shoulder.

Brian: “Look, down there…!”

He pointed towards a hallway where Hayasaka could make out a commotion at a bathroom door. They wasted no time rushing over to them, their whimpers and shrieks coming into clear. But Hayasaka immediately crashed to a halt on his heel as he saw who was still in the crowd.

Hayasaka: “M-Mai…!”

Mai: “... *In the bathroom* …”

Hayasaka: “Wh–Huh…?”

Gripping his hand around the doorframe, Hayasaka peeked inside.

Needless to say he almost belted out his insides right then and there.

How could he describe what he was looking at? It was absurd, it was strange, and it was downright insane. Water everywhere. Flooding the bathroom floor. Soaked and soppy, trashed and dirty. Marks on the wall. Blood. Of course there was blood. Why wouldn’t there be blood when he was staring at a *corpse* ?

A corpse. Of someone who was living and breathing and smiling only just yesterday.

…

[BDA]

…

And as *Retsuko* laid there on the flooded floor of the women’s bathroom of the karaoke bar, Hayasaka could only stare straight into her cold, shut eyes.

Because she wasn’t going to move again.

Because Retsuko was *dead* .

Chapter End Notes

emotionally screaming into a microphone
Rip 1/2 of the furries you will be missed
And before you say "I called it cuz Retsuko initiated the 1st rebuttal showdown in the trial", just know... it was a complete coincidence! I kid you not I just wanted Retsy to have some more spotlight in the trial and completely forgot about this 'trope' until people started bringing it up. And yes I know I did this for the 2nd victim of DR69 but that one wasn't intentional it was more or less for fun and I didn't realise half the population picked up on this trope now lol (so I'd rather you be happy with yourself that you got it right)
Anyway I had a lot of fun writing the scenes for this chapter so I hope you did as well <3

Chapter 2: Sinning Swimming Dying Diving (Deadly Life)

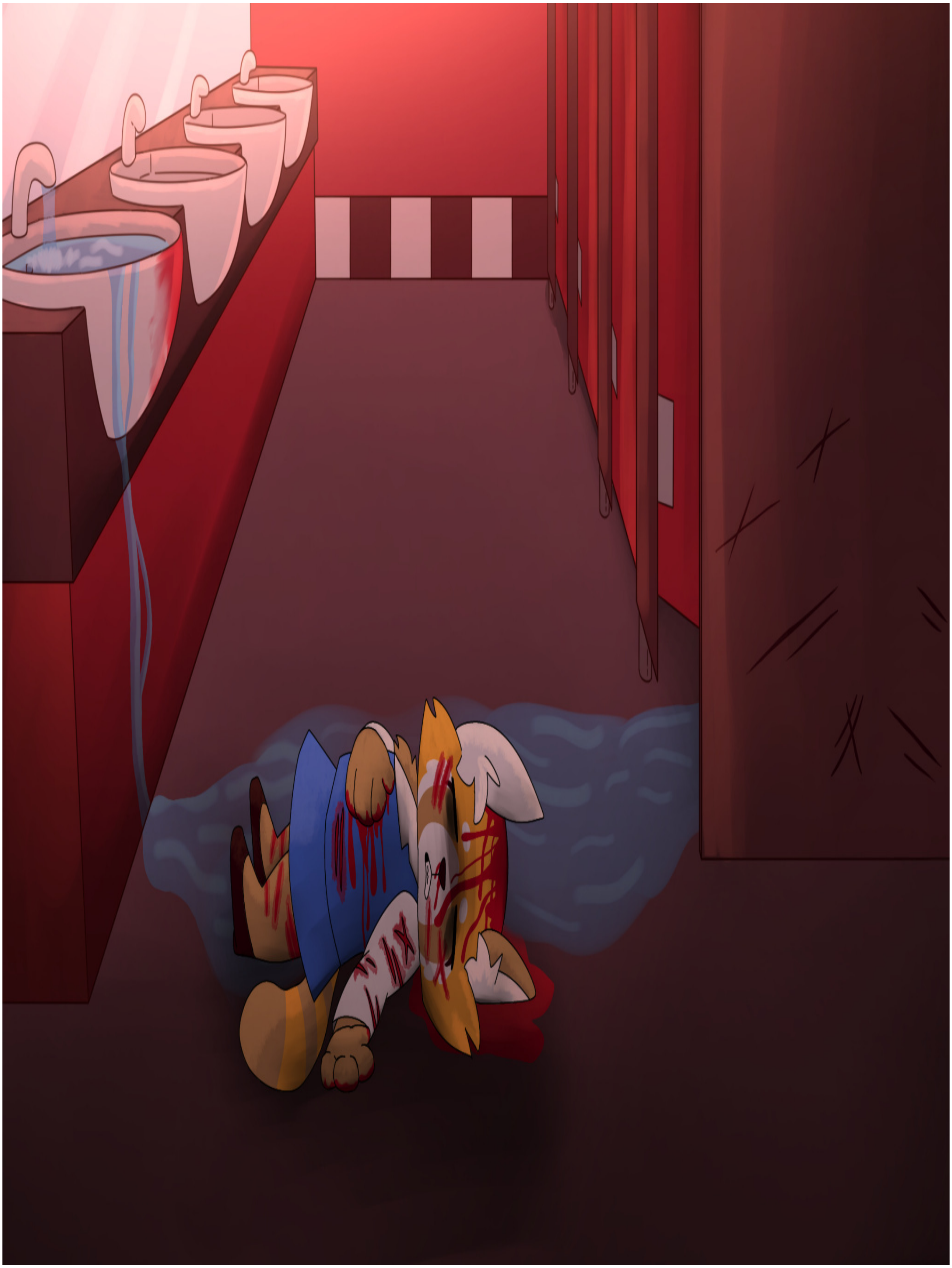
Chapter Notes

> Well then, the time has come to start the search on Retsy's untimely murder...
> Random tidbit but I just love how my Netflix 'continue watching' is just four shows: Breaking Bad, Bojack Horseman, Saiki K. and Aggretsuko -- really shows I only use it for them lmao
> So I mean, if you have Netflix, and you haven't seen any of these shows.... *slowly pushes them towards you* watchthemtheyaresogood

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was funny, really. Hayasaka was teetering on the edge of death this entire time. Any second he would've passed out, nothing to fight his body's urges with. Perhaps a day more and everything he had lived for would have ceased to exist its meaning. But that time didn't come. Instead, his fears of dying had been replaced by the fear of the defenceless and abused body of Retsuko right in front of him. He somehow hadn't passed out from the sheer craze of it all, even if he knew he wouldn't die from doing so anymore.

What would be the point of closing his eyes when he knew the scene in front of him was never going to change?



Just as quickly as Hayasaka himself had discovered the body, he heard the oncoming noise of more people entering the karaoke bar and realised they had all gathered from the issued announcement. It was a tight squeeze to peer into the bathroom to see who had died, and Hayasaka had no issue in excusing himself out of the way to tear his eyes off the repelling scene. He saw Kurumada arrive, and once he had snatched a peek himself, shuffled towards Hayasaka's side without a word exchanged.

Natsuki: "I-I didn't… I didn't want this to happen again! Why did this happen again? Why? Why?!"

Yuri: "Natsuki…! Take deep breaths, okay? I don't want you to overwhelm yourself…"

Bojack: "Alright – who is it this time?"

As Bojack arrived and checked the bathroom, Hayasaka watched as his face dropped. He stood there for a moment, arms wavering by his sides.

Jesse: "Bojack…"

Without another word, Bojack stepped into the bathroom and turned off the running tap. The closed tap dripped any remaining water that squeezed to escape before drowning the room in total silence. Taking one last side glance below at Retsuko's body, Bojack walked back out into the corridor and faced away from the bathroom doorway.

Kurumada: "It really happened again… *Godammnit* ."

L: "Hm… We've been granted a very interesting sight this time around."

Kurumada: "As if the burnt boat wasn't enough for you."

Monotora: "Oi, oi!"

Everyone, alongside Hayasaka, turned to watch the arrival of Monotora, who was bouncing their tail up and down with a sharp grin.

Monotora: “My oh my… I’m very happy to see that the motive worked out after all, eh? One of you’se caved in and turned to malice, kehe!”

Brian: “T-That’s not fair! We were given a time limit against our lives unlike the last motive…!”

Monotora: “Look who’s try’na talk, huh? Shut your trap, Brian, or I might just ‘accidentally’ lash out and claw into ya throat.”

Brian: “G-Gh…!”

Monotora: “Speaking of which, look at you all! You really can’t investigate with such drowsy eyes – you’ll probably miss a shit ton of evidence, haha!”

Ena: “As much as I would be grateful for the opportunity to rest my painful eyes, I do not wish to leave Miss Retsuko laying there longer than she should…”

Monotora: “Well, ya ain’t gonna be allowed to sleep during the investigation period, but fortunately for you, I have just the solution!”

Just then, Monotora began to cough and hack, body jittering and convulsing as they attempted to push something out of their system. Hayasaka watched on in growing disgust as Monotora finally regurgitated a white pill bottle that clacked onto the ground, no accompanying saliva to be seen. He sucked in a breath, holding back the urge to throw up at the sight. Monotora slobbered and shook their head, standing upright.

Monotora: “Eugh… There we go! These pills have been organically produced by Nesos to pull someone outta a state of a lack of sleep, trickin’ the brain into reversing the effects of sleep deprivation and allowin’ them energy to investigate, y’see?”

Kaidou: “...I don’t know if I wanna take this pill. I’ve been told not to take untrusted drugs from people…”

Latte: “I wouldn’t advise it either, Kaidou…”

Kurumada: “Not to mention how they literally puked out the damn thing!”

Monotora: “Well yer better! ‘Cuz if I catch ya snoozin’ during the investigation, I’m gonna bite your limbs off!”

L: “You always make quite the eccentric threat, don’t you?”

Jesse: “S’fine, guys. I’ll take it first.”

Dropping down to pick up the pill bottle, Jesse screwed open the lid and shook a pill into his palm, downing it after a moment’s hesitation. He handed it out towards the group, where L gladly accepted the offer. Soon, the bottle had been passed around to everyone, Hayasaka studying the lone pill in his shaky palm. No distinct colour or smell – just a white disc-shaped pill. Disregarding the lack of water to help, he gulped it down. Hayasaka would be lying if he said he couldn’t feel the effects kick in almost immediately in his system: body’s heaviness lifting away and brain sobering up to process coherent thoughts.

Hayasaka: “H-Hey… What exactly are in these pills…?”

Monotora: “That’s classified info, Dr. Twink! You’re better off usin’ that noggin to question more important things like the murder case, kehe.”

Bojack: “...I don’t feel anything different.”

Kurumada: “Same here – is it workin’ for anyone else?”

Mai: “It worked for me. Hm, perhaps yours was a placebo?”

Monotora: “Hehehe… Ain’t no fake, that pill. S’just that you two are more, how should I word this, *bulkier* than the rest of the group, n’ so the pill will take a lil’ longer to kick in.”

Kurumada: “...Great.”

Monotora: “Oh, and just so ya know, your tablets have been updated with the new Nesos file like last time. Well then, look bright n’ sharp for the day ahead of ya, ahaha!”

Monotora then spun around and pounced down the corridor out of the karaoke bar.

L: “Hm… Alright then. Knowing how much time we possess from the previous investigation, we need to start searching around as soon as possible.”

Bojack: “You really like to take people’s grieving away, don’t you?”

L: “...It’s a different case when you don’t get attached to people.”

Jesse: “Hey, Bojack… It’s gonna be alright, yo. We’re–we’re gonna find Retsuko’s killer, and they ain’t gonna get away with this – I know that’s what you want.”

Bojack: “And you didn’t feel any better after watching Hiroshi die. So what’s the point?”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “...No, I’m sorry. I know it’s different – it’s obviously different: you knew Walter longer than I did with her. Look, I… Uh, I’d rather not be in the same room as her body right now. Just… don’t be too harsh with her, okay? If anyone needs me – which I doubt – I’ll be outside having a smoke.”

With that stumble of words, Bojack turned to leave.

Jesse: “...I’m goin’ with him. ‘Cuz… he needs someone there, just to stand with him. Even if he doesn’t realise he does.”

Jesse then left the group for Bojack outside.

Hayasaka: (“Despite how Bojack pushed him away these past few days, Jesse just wants to help him right now…”)

L: “Seeing as the rest of us have stayed behind, I advise we should all split up and search around every nook and cranny of this karaoke bar – evidence may not be necessarily concentrated in the bathroom only.”

Mai: “I volunteer to stay close to Retsuko. I just feel so awful for my plans overtaking my need to look out for everyone else’s safety.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Mai… I-It’s not your fault in the end. You didn’t know this was going to happen.”

Mai: “...I suppose you have a point. Thank you, Hayasaka.”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Mai. I’ll stay put with you.”

Watching as the group began to spread out, Hayasaka noticed Kurumada cross his arms.

Kurumada: “I guess we should start investigatin’ ourselves, huh?”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, Kurumada, I don’t think it’s wise to push yourself into this just yet. Your pill still hasn’t taken its effect on you yet, has it?”

Kurumada: “...Shit. I guess you’re right. Might as well step outside for a minute ‘til it kicks in.”

Hayasaka: “Will you be alright? Should I come with you?”

Kurumada: “Nah, it’s fine. Don’t let me drag you down or nothin’.”

Hayasaka nodded and Kurumada took it as permission to head out.

Hayasaka: (“I suppose I have no choice but to investigate by myself, haha…”)

Brian: “U-Um, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Brian: “I was just overhearing you guys – n-not in a weird way or anything – and I was wondering if I could help you out instead? Only if you want, that is…”

Hayasaka: “Of course – I don’t mind that, haha…” (“Brian has good searching skills, doesn’t he? Especially finding that letter on the boat… Even so, something inside me would like to accompany him despite that…”)

INVESTIGATION

Brian: “So… Um, I have to admit that I didn’t really know where to start last time, and I sort of just drifted around on my own.”

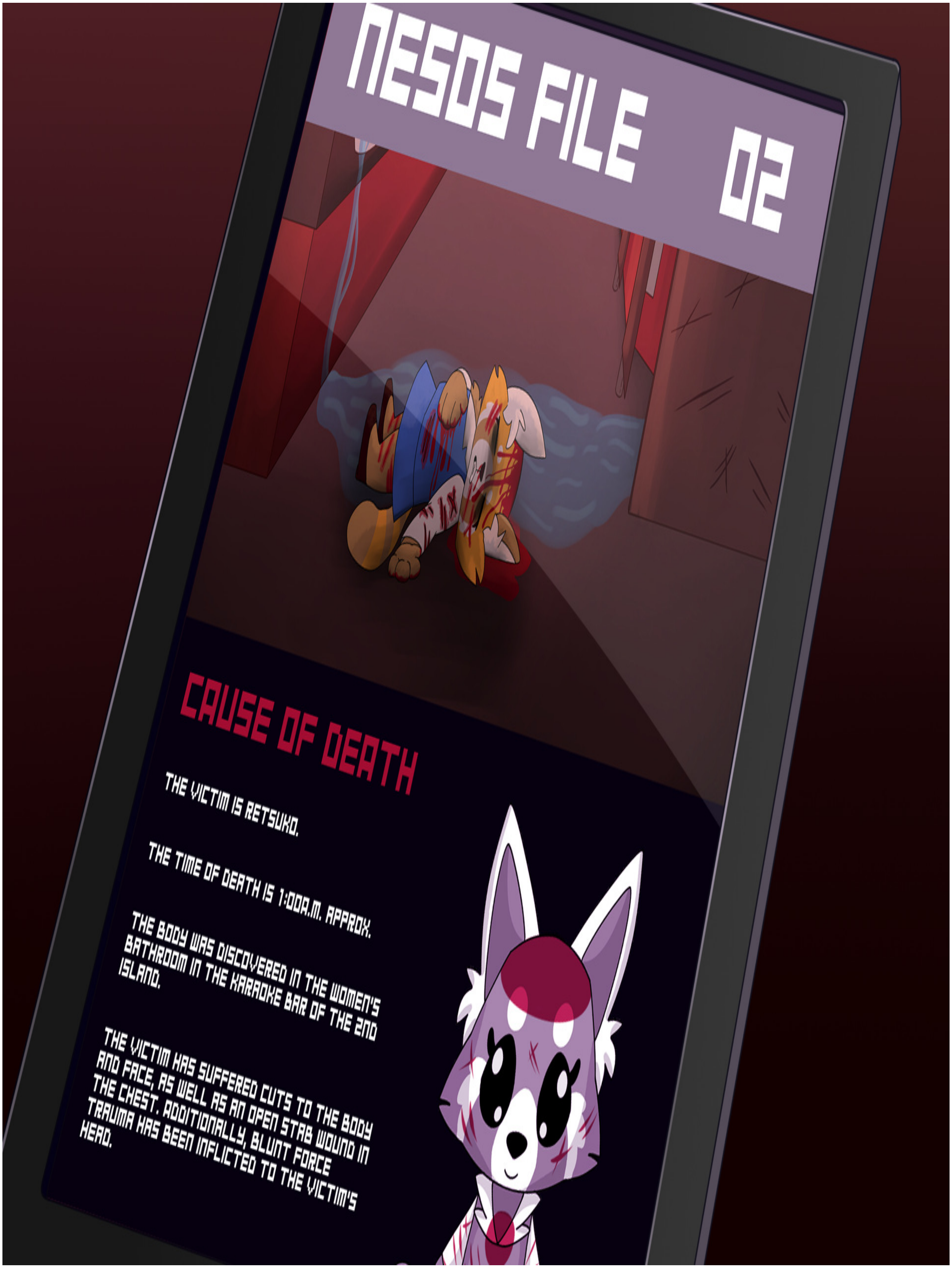
Hayasaka: “That’s alright. We’re not really detectives, par L… H-How about we read the Nesos file first? That’s where Kurumada and I started last time. It helped to give a basic gist over the case.”

Brian: “That… actually sounds like a reasonable thing to do. *Why didn’t I think of that before* …”

Sympathetically shaking his head at Brian's mutter, Hayasaka retrieved his tablet and navigated to the newly added Nesos File. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Brian follow suit, albeit much more gradually as he kept hovering his index finger above the screen as if he was unsure what to tap.

Hayasaka: ("Has he never opened the Nesos File before, or is Brian not very equipped with technology…?")

Regardless, Hayasaka trailed his eyes back to his own screen: the file layout was similar to Walter's, however changed in certain aspects to fit Retsuko's case. Reluctantly scanning the images for a moment, he read the file.



NESOS FILE 02

CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS RETSUKO.

THE TIME OF DEATH IS 1:00A.M. APPROX.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN THE WOMEN'S BATHROOM IN THE KARAOKE BAR OF THE 2ND ISLAND.

THE VICTIM HAS SUFFERED CUTS TO THE BODY AND FACE, AS WELL AS AN OPEN STAB WOUND IN THE CHEST. ADDITIONALLY, BLUNT FORCE TRAUMA HAS BEEN INFLICTED TO THE VICTIM'S HEAD.

The victim is Retsuko. The time of death is 1:00A.M. approx. The body was discovered in the women's bathroom in the Karaoke Bar of the 2nd Island. The victim has suffered cuts to the body and face, as well as an open stab wound in the chest. Additionally, blunt force trauma has been inflicted to the victim's head.

Hayasaka: "...She seems to have been killed rather late at night."

Brian: "I guess the murder could've taken place at any time since we were all forced to be awake, huh?"

Hayasaka: ("But doesn't that mean anyone could be a potential suspect…? Not only that, but it appears Walter's rule about staying inside the hotel during nighttime hours has been promptly disregarded at this point.")

Brian: "Also, um, is this how the Nesos File is supposed to be written? Without the cause of death stated? Because it only lists two fatal wounds."

Hayasaka: "Not again…" ("Is it a mistake? Or is this another mystery left by the killer? Well, only time will tell…")

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File #2

Slipping his tablet away, Hayasaka peered once more into the bathroom, and at *her* . Hayasaka couldn't even bear to look at Retsuko's pained face – unlike Walter, she appeared much more vulnerable, even after death. Taking a shaky breath, he rubbed his wrists.

Brian: "...Hayasaka, are you alright? You don't want to investigate her body, do you?"

Hayasaka: "Ah, n-no, not at all. I really don't want this to become a recurring thing for me. I don't want to get used to… *this* ."

Brian: "Same here. It's just, even if she is such a small animal, what's been done to her is so cruel…"

Hayasaka: “And yet, to not check would be stupid, wouldn’t it? I suppose we could look at her last before leaving the bathroom…”

Brian: “Whatever you want is fine with me. Um, how about we start over there then?”

Brian pointed towards the once running tap a few ways from Retsuko’s body. Carefully stepping past her and the puddle of water, they took a closer inspection at the sink.

Hayasaka: “It’s strange how it was left on in the first place, isn’t it? It implies someone never had the opportunity to turn it off…”

Brian: “Do you think it was Retsuko?”

Hayasaka: “It might’ve been…” (“Would there even be a different motive to leaving it on other than usual bathroom purposes? Well, if this is anything like the previous case, we can’t stay closed minded.”)

Brian: “At least we know the overflowing tap had to have been the cause of the flooded bathroom, right? Too bad our shoes are going to be soggy after the investigation, haha…”

Truth bullet obtained: Running Bathroom Tap

Brian: “Um, so… are we going to address the blood right there?”

Hayasaka: “... *sigh* , I suppose we have to.”

Hesitant to move closer, Hayasaka peered at the smeared blood stain on the side of the sink.

Brian: “It looks pretty smudged.”

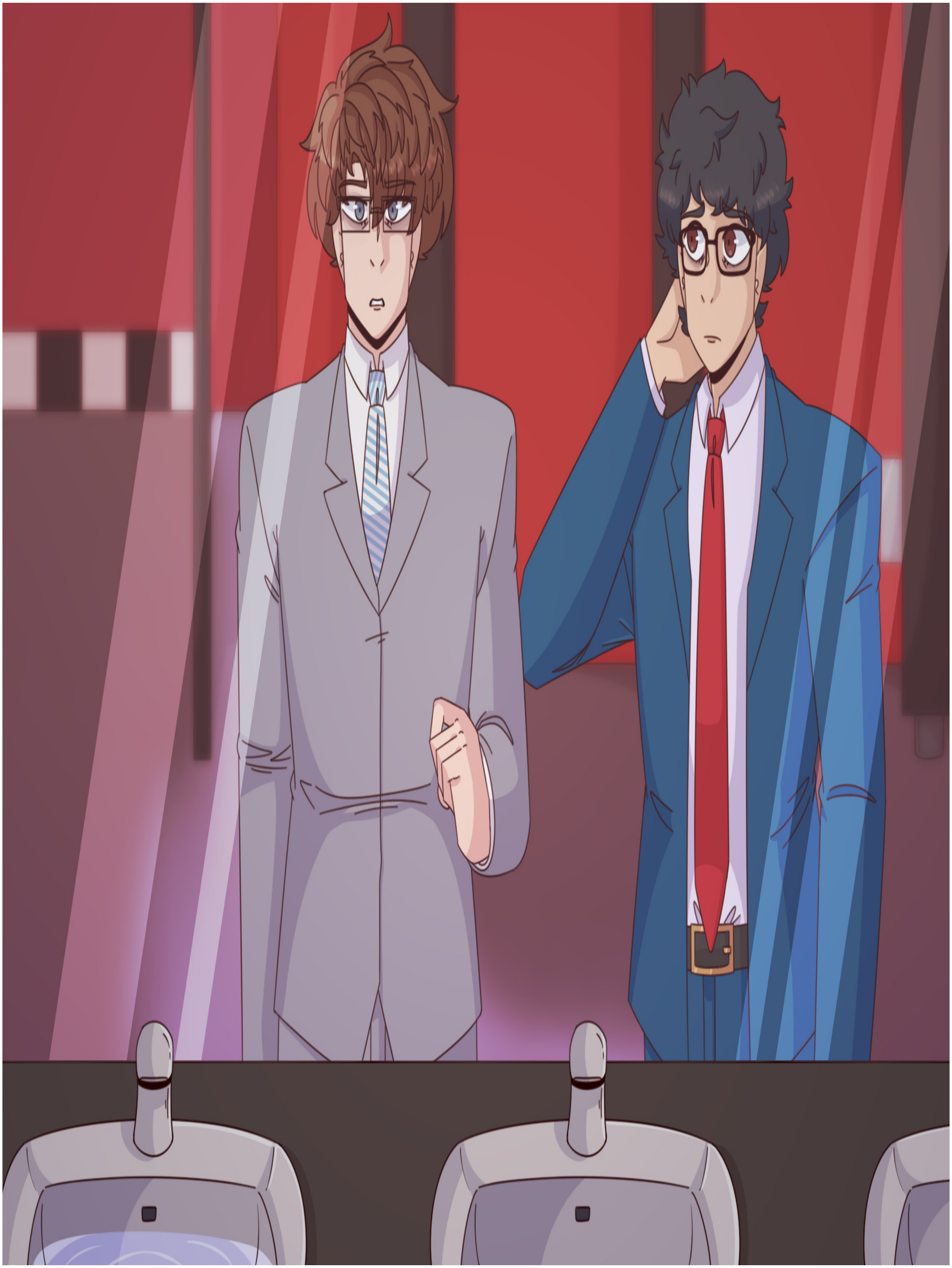
Hayasaka: “And faint. Although, I suppose that’s due to the overflowing water cleaning it off.”

Brian: “...Do you think something bad happened here for there to be blood?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t know. I-I don’t wish to think about it, really…” (“Sooner or later, however, I will have to acknowledge its purpose. I really hate doing this…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Blood on Bathroom Sink

Glancing up from the sink, Hayasaka caught himself in the reflection of the mirror in front of him. Peering at the sight through his lenses, he paused.



Despite ingesting that pill which helped to regain his energy, appearance-wise he remained incredibly dishevelled and fatigued. Brian was no different, as he looked quite akin to himself (par the usual likeness between the two).

Hayasaka: ("I never even realised I looked *this* bad… I probably would've laughed if I didn't feel so tense…")

Brian: "Hey, Hayasaka…"

Hayasaka: "What is it, Brian?"

Brian: "Behind us… I think there's something on the wall – I-I can see it in the reflection. Are those scratch marks?"

Turning on his heel, Hayasaka confirmed that Brian was right. Littered on the back wall of the bathroom stalls were sharp marks that slashed in every which direction. He held back a shudder at the violent display.

Brian: "Were those there this entire time?"

Hayasaka: "I don't think so. The karaoke bar appeared new and unused to me when we first inspected it, so it'd be strange for the bathrooms to have originally been vandalised like this."

Brian: "So then it has to be related to the case… R-Right?"

Hayasaka: "...We can only assume so."

Truth bullet obtained: Marks on Bathroom Walls

Now that he was facing the stalls, Hayasaka was quick to catch that one of the doors was slightly ajar; what was even more apparent was the presence of a stream of water leaking out from inside.

Hayasaka: “Brian, do you see that open stall over there?”

Brian: “Huh? Oh, yeah, I do. Mm, should I go take a look?”

Hayasaka: “W-Well that’s…”

But before Hayasaka could vocalise how odd he felt the idea was, Brian was already walking towards the stall. However, as he nudged the door inwards, he immediately slipped a step back.

Brian: “Eugh…!”

Baffled at such a reaction, Hayasaka hurried to his side only to witness what seemed to be a clogged toilet alongside a pool of bathroom water sitting around the toilet, dowsing everything in fluid. He couldn’t see much else, and that he thanked god for.

Hayasaka: “ *What a pleasant sight, haha* …”

Brian: “H-Hey, I wonder if this clogged toilet had something to do with the flooded bathroom as well…”

As he said that, Brian tried a reluctant step closer to the toilet to peer down into what was inside.

Brian: “It kinda looks like a bunch of toilet paper was shoved down into it, considering all the, um, soggy paper floating in the bowl…”

Hayasaka: (“As if it were forced, or…?”) “Ah, thank you for that, Brian. But, you really weren’t expected to do that if you didn’t want to.”

Brian: “Oh, no, it’s fine. You could say I’m a little used to unhygienic bathrooms at this point: the only one in Sintracorp wasn’t all that taken care of, either.”

Hayasaka: (“The… the *only one* ? Brian, what kind of company did you used to work for…? Ah, there’s no use getting hung up on that right now. If anything, I’ll need to remember this toilet, just in case.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Clogged Toilet Stall

One final scan around the claustrophobic bathroom notioned Hayasaka’s anxiety to flare up, realising there was nothing else worth noting aside from Retsuko’s body. Hesitantly, he tracked his gaze towards her.

Hayasaka: “A-Are you ready to go over to Retsuko, Brian…?”

Brian: “Uh, Hayasaka, I’ve been meaning to ask this, but do you have experience with autopsies or something? I noticed you checked out Walter’s body during the last investigation.”

Hayasaka: “I, well… No. I-I have decent knowledge on medicine and medical records only, and I really only know the basics of certain injuries. Despite that, I feel as if I should give my efforts with what I can provide to be as much help as I can.”

Brian: “Wow, that’s… a really selfless thing to do.”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t want to be praised for such a thing… Looking over corpses…”

Brian: “O-Oh. When you put it like that, it does sound a little… Um, s-sorry…”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s fine. We should just get this over and done with, haha.”

The two then began to walk over to Retsuko, only to see L already crouched beside her and checking her over.

L: “Nice to see you again, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: (“How is this in any way nice? Saying it so casually as if we’re both not about to search a corpse…”) “L… Do you have experience with corpses by any chance?”

L: “...I suppose you could say I’m good at looking past what’s been presented right in front of me.”

Brian: “How does that answer his question…?”

Acknowledging what he had to do next, Hayasaka inhaled a deep breath (which was slightly unpleasant considering the lack of windows in the cramped karaoke bar), and kneeled down beside Retsuko, avoiding getting his suit soaked from the water pool. Brian opted to stay standing, which Hayasaka very much relieved upon for his own sanity, but peered down to keep a close eye.

Brian: “...Where do you normally start first?”

Hayasaka: “Whatever catches my attention first, I suppose.” (“And what’s caught it first is definitely those slash wounds around her body. They’re all rather random, in size and location. It seems a bit… excessive for whoever inflicted these.”)

Brian: “What do you make of the stab wound in her chest? Something like that seems like the fatal wound, right? I’m not sure how you’d be able to survive that…”

Hayasaka: “Well…”

But as Hayasaka leaned forward to grasp a better look, he faltered.

Hayasaka: “T-That’s strange… There’s something off with these wounds.”

Brian: “What do you mean? I’ve never really looked at stab wounds in any detail before…”

Hayasaka: “You see… Ah, I’m not sure how to go about this. I’d like to show you a visual example of what I mean, but unfortunately I can’t just go ahead and stab someone, haha…”

L: “You probably could, provided with a willing volunteer.”

Hayasaka: “I-It was only a joke!”

L: “As was mine.”

Brian: “Huh…?”

Hayasaka: “N-Nevermind…”

Brian: “It’s okay – I’ll try to understand it verbally.”

Hayasaka: “...The clotting. It’s irregular. Or, well, not really present, to phrase it better.”

Brian titled his head with a blank look. Hayasaka’s shoulders dropped.

Hayasaka: “U-Usually, when the skin is cut, the body’s defence system kicks in and clots the wound in order to stop the bleeding. Here, it should’ve been no different for Retsuko, and yet… it is.”

Brian: “Oh, I see… Okay, I-I get that. So if that’s the case, then something weird must’ve happened to cause it.”

Hayasaka: (“This… This probably isn’t as simple as it’s laid out. We’ll need to keep track of this, for our own safety.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Stab Wound and Cuts

Moving off from the stab marks, Hayasaka steered towards Retsuko's head only to wince at the sight.

Hayasaka: ("Ah, god, it's so…")

L: "You've caught yourself looking at the head wound, I take it? It's majorly bloody and open – not for the faint of heart."

Hayasaka: ("...Y-Yes, something like that. But did he have to be so *detailed* ?")

L: "It's also deep – oddly so – which begs the question on why the killer needed to deal such a heavy blow when Retsuko is far from anything big herself…"

Brian: "Um, isn't talking about her like that a little rude?"

L: "It's only logical we recognise that Retsuko is an awfully easy murder target: she's at least a few feet smaller than the rest of us."

Hayasaka felt a knot rise in his stomach at the comment, feeling his knees shuffle awkwardly.

Hayasaka: ("What kind of cruel person would target Retsuko? Was a simple body all they needed?")

Truth bullet obtained: Retsuko's Head Wound

Straining his eyes around her body one last time, Hayasaka gratefully allowed himself the relief of ending his 'autopsy' here. Before he could lift himself up however, L put his hand out.

Hayasaka: "U-Um?"

L: “Even if you think you're finished, I believe there’s someone who hasn’t. Brian, could you come down here and check for yourself?”

Brian: “What? M-Me? I’d, ah, I don’t really want to myself…”

L: “It’s important we get another perspective on the body just in case. Due to Retsuko’s size, it can be easy to miss any details.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “Brian, you don’t have to force yourself if you don’t want to…”

Brian: “...N-No, I’ll give it a shot. This is to help save everyone, isn’t it?”

Brian then adversely bent down onto his knees, focusing hard on Retsuko. Hayasaka remained seated, watching him alongside L. He could tell Brian was slightly pressured with the added audience, so he instead shifted his attention to his own palms resting on his thighs, one another picking at the fingertips.

Brian: “...I…I, um, I think I’ve found something. I don’t know if it’s important, though…”

L: “Go on.”

Brian: “O-Okay… Her claws. They have blood on them.”

Hayasaka: (“They do…?”)

L: “How peculiar. None of the stab wounds are located anywhere near Retsuko’s paws, so it’s safe to assume it cannot simply be blood that’s dripped down.”

Hayasaka: “Then what do you believe to be the cause?”

L: “Well, the only explanation is that Retsuko must’ve used them herself.”

Brian: “H-Huh? T-There’s no way that’s possible! Retsuko would never hurt anyone…!”

Hayasaka: “T-That is true, haha… Retsuko was quite the passive type.”

L: “People can change when threatened with their life, you see.”

Hayasaka: (“But then… just what does that mean for the case? Why would Retsuko need to attack someone?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Blood on Claws

Brian: “So, uh, does this mean I’m done?”

L: “If you can’t see anything else, then of course.”

Brian: “Oh, thank goodness…”

Brian heaved out a heavy exhale and pulled himself up from the floor. Hayasaka followed suit, grateful that he didn’t need to subject himself to ingraining the image of Retsuko’s corpse into his mind anymore than he needed to.

L: “It appears I’m just about complete with my analysis on the body as well. In that case, I’ll be moving on to searching for potential murder weapons. As none have been spotted present around the scene as of yet, I’m not going to subject myself into waiting around until the trial to identify what it could be as with last time.”

Kaidou: “Hey, we could help!”

Hayasaka shifted his body to catch Kaidou and Saiki standing by the doorway, the former sporting an earnest grin.

Kaidou: “I overheard you just now talking about finding the murder weapon, and me and Saiki could help out to cover ground!”

L: “Hm… That isn’t a poor idea, Kaidou. Perhaps my initial perspective of you may need some changing.”

Kaidou: “What do you mean…?”

Saiki: “ *I think he’s calling you an idiot* .”

L: “Now, now – would I be so ignorant to call the Ultimate Academic Prodigy incompetent?”

Kaidou: “The Jet Black Wings *is* pretty intelligent after all! Hehe.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Good save, I suppose?”)

L: “Let’s focus now; we’re losing time as we speak. Kaidou, Saiki, you two go look for something sharp that could’ve been used to inflict Retsuko’s stab wounds. On the other hand, I’ll be searching for blunt objects that could’ve performed blunt force onto her head.”

The three then split up, leaving Hayasaka and Brian standing alone once again.

Brian: “So, where should we go now? I don’t really know my way around the karaoke bar all that well.”

Hayasaka: (“Since Retsuko’s murder took place in a building, I wonder if it’s best to take into account the layout…”) “We could take a look at the map perhaps.”

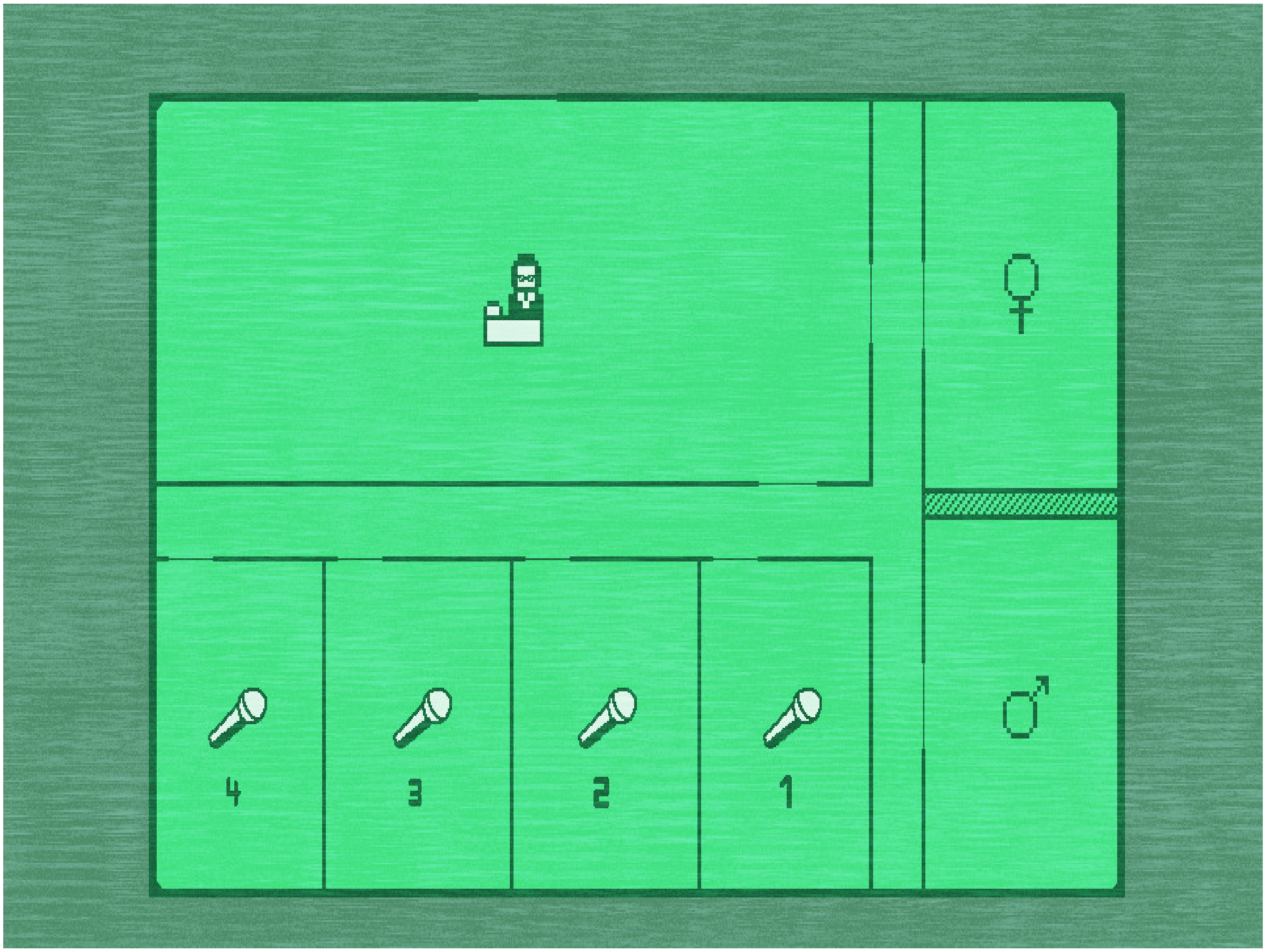
Reaching his hand into his pocket, Hayasaka retrieved his tablet. It was hard not to notice Brian attempting to peer overhead to view his screen, albeit upside down, while he navigated to the map.

Brian: “ *Oh, so that’s how you do it* …”

Hayasaka: “What was that?”

Brian: “N-Nothing, haha…”

Holding back the urge to question further, Hayasaka pivoted on one heel so that he and Brian could both see the screen facing the right way up.



Agreeing to relocate their investigation elsewhere, they left the bathroom. Outside, Hayasaka noted the presence of Mai and Latte, who were gently comforting each other about the murder case. As he approached them, Mai shot him a warm smile despite her upturned brows.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello… How’re you two doing?”

Mai: “I’m not sure, honestly… Oh, I just feel so guilty for not checking up on Retsuko properly yesterday.”

Latte: “And I wished I had tried harder to convince her to give up on her drinking…”

Hayasaka: “P-Please don’t blame yourselves. What happened to Retsuko isn’t your fault… Haha, it’d only be so if either of you were the killer, right?”

Mai: “Hayasaka, how could you accuse us of such a thing? I’ll have you know me and Latte were together the entire night yesterday!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m sorry, it was only a bad joke–! …Wait, y-you were? What were you doing together…?”

Mai: “Hehe… It’s rude to ask two ladies what they did together the previous night alone, is it not~?”

Brian raised a brow at her mischievous comment, and Latte’s cheeks washed over with a mild shade of red.

Latte: “Ah, haha, I assure you I was merely demonstrating my latte magic to Mai in my hotel room.”

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“But, Mai, I really wish you’d stop being so playful, even during a murder investigation of all things…”)

Brian: “Wait. Um, you guys were the first to find Retsuko’s body, right?”

Hayasaka: (“Brian’s right – since all the girls had gathered here for Mai’s girl-trip, that must’ve been how they all found Retsuko…”) “Do you mind telling us what happened…?”

Mai: “Not at all! You see, when we all arrived at the karaoke bar, Natsuki had spoken up that she needed the bathroom, and so Yuri volunteered to accompany her. It wasn’t long until we heard a scream, and we all came rushing over to see… well, Retsuko…”

Hayasaka: “Then if you had never planned to come here, who knows when Retsuko’s body would’ve been found…”

Latte: “I’d like to think we probably would’ve started a search party when we realised she was missing for a while.”

Mai: “But it would’ve been impossible for a guy to find her, hm?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Why?”

Mai: “Oh, do you not know about the karaoke bathroom locks? Apparently, the only way to gain access inside is by swiping your tablet on the pad beside the door. See?”

Mai gestured towards the bathroom doorway, and Hayasaka was surprised to be met with a small black pad fixed to the wall.

Hayasaka: (“I must’ve missed that in my haze from earlier…”)

Brian: “But what did you mean by the ‘guy’ part?”

Mai: “The bathrooms only grant access according to the correct sex listed on the tablet. So, only ladies can go in the ladies room, and vice versa with the gents!”

Hayasaka: “That’s a… weird system.”

Brian: “Yeah. Even the hotel bathrooms don’t do that.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, perhaps since karaoke bars are infamous for getting drunk in, this system is to protect people? Then again, it doesn’t account for same sex situations, does it…?”) “Thank you for the explanation, regardless.”

Truth bullet obtained: Mai’s Account

Latte: “I hope your investigation goes well!”

Mai: “For you and your new friend, hehe.”

Hayasaka faltered for a moment, glancing over at Brian.

Hayasaka: (“Friends… We are friends, aren’t we? Is that what you’d call this: having coffee together, inviting him alongside me to events, investigating together? A-As long as Brian feels the same way, then…”)

Brian noticed his eyes intent on him, and his lips upturned timidly. Hayasaka felt himself imitate the gesture back.

Hayasaka: (“...Probably.”)

He then promptly nodded towards Mai and Latte as not to set them off suspicious from their prolonged lingering. Brian and him then set off back into the main lobby, where they spotted Natsuki and Yuri attentive to something on the floor with furrowed eyebrows.

Hayasaka: “A-Are you two alright?”

Natsuki: “...I dunno. There’s some kind of weird stain on the floor…”

Yuri: “I-I think… From the colour alone, it may be dried blood.”

Brian: “W-What…?! How could there be blood out *here* ?”

Natsuki: “That’s what I was thinking too…”

Yuri: “We all probably didn’t notice it beforehand when we first arrived as it blended in with the red carpet. But, now that I can see it, it does feel really suspicious…”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s good you caught this, however.” (“This is definitely something to keep in mind, no matter the questions it arises… and it arises a lot.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Blood Stain on Carpet

Natsuki: “Jeeze… Why did Retsuko have to be killed in the karaoke bar of all places? It feels really insignificant, honestly…”

Hayasaka: “I suppose you have a point. Did any of you know anything off about this place beforehand?”

Yuri: “...A-Actually, I think I might’ve. Sometimes when I spent the night reading in the library opposite, I’d hear… *noises* coming from the karaoke bar when I left. I couldn’t make out what the noises were exactly as it was too muffled to hear, b-but I was too nervous to investigate by myself…”

Brian: “Do you think someone was using the karaoke bar?”

Natsuki: “I doubt that. We were all too tired to even think about doing stuff like this. Well, except for Mai’s stupid idea to come here today…”

Regarding the remark, Hayasaka gave her a look, and she quickly averted her eyes.

Natsuki: “...N-No offence to your friend, I mean.”

Hayasaka: “ *sigh* , it’s alright. Mai’s ideas can be a little… impulsive, from time to time. Thank you for the information, Yuri. I’m sure it may be helpful later.”

Yuri: “I'll be glad if it does, even if only a little…”

Truth bullet obtained: Yuri's Account

Natsuki: “I guess we gotta keep looking around, huh? C'mon, Yuri.”

Discretely tugging at her sleeve, Natsuki led Yuri elsewhere, the latter of which politely nodding at the two before their departure.

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka, I was just thinking about something…”

Hayasaka: “Oh? What is it?”

Brian: “Since Retsuko was always drinking with Bojack during the evenings, maybe he knows something about how she got to the karaoke bar in the first place.”

Hayasaka: “You aren't wrong… Even yesterday, she decided to have another drink with him. Not to mention that the stage bar is only around the corner from the karaoke bar…”

Brian: “So he should've been the last person to see her, right? Should we go ask him about it…?”

Hayasaka nodded, directing his attention towards the double glass doors. Stepping outside, he felt the brisk early-day air hit his face, cheeks and nose flushed with sultriness. On one side of the door was Bojack and Jesse: they were leaning against the building, quietly dragging on cigarettes. Turning to view the opposite side, Hayasaka noticed Kurumada, arms crossed with his leg raised and resting against the wall. Catching eye contact, he kicked himself off the wall and approached him.

Kurumada: “Hey, you. How're ya doing?”

Hayasaka: “I think I'm getting along well: I've discovered a fair few clues so far. Ah, and how're you feeling right now…?”

Kurumada: “Just about ready to join up with ya again.”

Hayasaka: “Haha, that’s good to hear.”

Kurumada then shifted his gaze towards Brian beside him.

Kurumada: “...What’s he doin’ here?”

Brian: “Oh, w-we’re investigating together…”

Kurumada: “Ya are? …You better not be replacin’ me.”

Brian: “I-I-I’m not! I just wanted to help out!”

Kurumada: “M’just jokin’.”

Brian: “Oh…”

Kurumada: “...So, what’re you out here for, anyway?”

Hayasaka: “We were just about to question Bojack, seeing as we believe he might’ve been the last person in contact with Retsuko before she died.”

Kurumada nodded, tagging along with the two over to Jesse and Bojack, the former giving them a brief wave.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello, ah, could you two put out your cigarettes if it isn’t too much trouble? We’d like to ask you something…”

Jesse: “Sure thing.”

Jesse proceeded to flick his cigarette to the ground and twisted his heel into it, a trail of frail smoke churning out of the disfigured stick. He nudged Bojack to do the same, who sighed before following along. Kurumada grunted under his breath.

Kurumada: “ *Oh sure, put them out for him why don’t ya…* ”

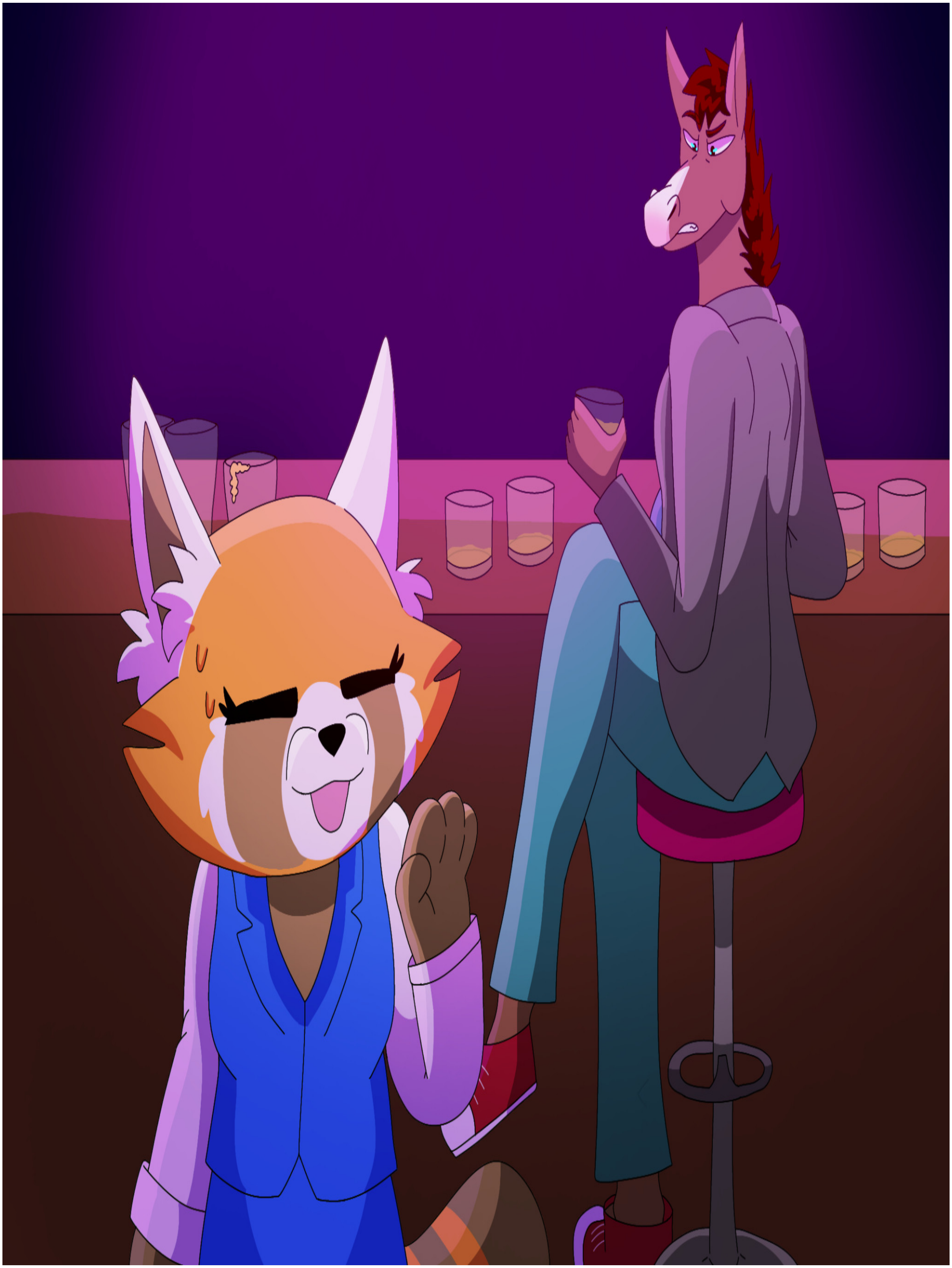
Hayasaka: “ *D-Don’t create conflict…* Thank you for that. Now, um, Bojack, you were drinking at the stage bar with Retsuko last night, right?”

Bojack: “...We were. Wait. You’re not… accusing me of killing her, are you? I probably should’ve been the last person to see her and everything – is that what you’re thinking?”

Brian: “N-No! We’re only wondering if you knew what happened to her that night…”

Bojack: “...Right. Well, I got pretty drunk – which isn’t easy since I need a lot of alcohol to do so – and Retsuko… I don’t know if she did the same. At one point, though, she did excuse herself to go somewhere…”

FLASHBACK



Retsuko: “Ah, um, mind if I excuse myself?”

Bojack: “Leaving so soon again?”

Retsuko: “Haha, yeah. There’s just… somewhere I have to go.”

Bojack: “Can’t it wait? Are you really going to make me drink alone?”

Retsuko: “Mm… No. And you’re not going to guilt me like that, you jerk.”

Bojack: “I can stop when I want – it’s a choice.”

Retsuko: “Hehe… *sigh* , have a good night, Bojack.”

FLASHBACK END

Bojack: “I guess she needed to go to the bathroom or something if she was that desperate. She did that a lot.”

Hayasaka: “I see… And what happened after that?”

Bojack: “After that… I kept drinking. Like I usually did. And then I passed out. I woke up to the body discovery announcement – did you know how loud that thing is – and… here we are now.”

Kurumada: “Is that it?”

Bojack: “I was black-out drunk, what did you expect?”

Brian: “I wonder… Was that really what Retsuko was going to do?”

Jesse: “I mean, the nearest bathroom from the stage bar *is* the one in the karaoke bar. Ain’t one in the stage bar as far as I know.”

Bojack: “Really? I sure as hell didn’t.”

Jesse tugged at his beanie with a sigh.

Hayasaka: (“Something about Bojack’s account seems strange, but from what I’ve seen so far, what he said does seem plausible…”) “T-Thank you for the account.”

Bojack nodded, lighting up another cigarette in his hands.

Bojack: “And, uh, thank you. For doing what you can for her case.”

Truth bullet obtained: Bojack’s Account

As the two guys went back to smoking, Hayasaka could tell that it was time to part ways. Going back inside the karaoke bar with his investigation partners, he spotted a familiar diligent face shuffling a hand through a basket on the lobby countertop. Pointing him out, the three walked over to him.

Brian: “What’re you doing, L?”

L: “Just taking a look at these microphones. According to the sign beside them, there are supposed to be sixteen present – I’m assuming one for each person from our initial full group. As well as this, each microphone can connect to any karaoke machine via bluetooth technology, therefore a single booth could theoretically host up to the entire roster.”

Hayasaka: (“Impressive… If not for the horrible situation currently.”)

Brian: “Oh, so are all the microphones there?”

L: “Mm… No. There’s one missing.”

Kurumada: “Missin’, eh? You think that’s suspicious then?”

L: “Not particularly. There’s actually something more so I wish to test.”

Hayasaka: “And what is that…?”

L: “To find out, I propose we take these microphones into one of the karaoke booths.”

Brian: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: (“Whatever L’s thinking, I don’t think it’s worth ignoring. With the way he handled some parts of the last trial in rather unorthodox ways, it’s safe to assume he has wise intentions…”) “Then, should we help you?”

Kurumada: “Really?”

L: “That would be most beneficial to our time limit, Hayasaka. Come now.”

Picking up the basket in one hand, L led the uncertain three to the nearest karaoke booth down the hall. Hayasaka watched as L grabbed one of the microphones at random and started to hook it up to the machine.

Kurumada: “What? Are ya gonna make us sing or somethin’? Bwaha– *huh* ?”

Kurumada’s chuckle was cut short as L handed him the microphone with an outstretched hand.

L: “You’re going to do just that.”

Kurumada: “What the? Is this some kinda joke?”

L: “Not at all. Just talk into the mic, would you?”

Kurumada, with furrowed brows, snatched the microphone from L’s pale grip. Grunting, he brought it up to his lips.

Kurumada: “ *Like this* ?”

Just as he spoke, Kurumada’s voice echoed grizzly out of the karaoke machine’s speakers, an overlay of faint static accompanying his processed words.

Brian: “ *Gaah–!* ”

Hayasaka hadn’t realised Brian was unknowingly standing right beside the speakers until his cry shot into his ears. Having got an unpleasant earful, he covered his ears and hunched into himself.

Brian: “O-Ow…”

Unconcerned with the hijink, L disconnected the microphone with a contented hum. He then repeated the cycle by connecting yet another new microphone to the machine and handing it over to Kurumada.

Brian: “W-Wait! Don’t do it again–!!”

Kurumada: “Hello–?”

Nothing emitted from the speakers. Brian practically gushed out a sigh of pure relief.

Kurumada: “The hell? Is this thing broken or somethin’?”

L: “...How interesting.”

Hayasaka: “Um, w-what was that all about?”

L: “I don’t have enough evidence yet to state a conclusion. We’ll need to sort through the remaining microphones to check if they all work as well.”

Brian: “Do we really have to? I feel like this’ll take forever… *Not to mention that I really don’t want to go deaf today …*”

L: “I suppose you’re free to leave to continue investigating elsewhere.”

But before the three could leave, L tapped Kurumada on the shoulder.

L: “You, however, will need to stay here with me to help finish conducting this experiment, since you so kindly offered to volunteer.”

Kurumada: “But you were the one to hand me the mic in the first place, dumbass!”

Hayasaka: K-Kurumada… I believe we can trust L. Brian and I will be alright on our own for a little while longer, anyhow.”

Kurumada: “... *tch* , guess I can stay behind if ya need me that badly.”

Giving Kurumada a reassuring smile and nod, Hayasaka walked out the booth with Brian, who was still rubbing his temples after the whole speaker debacle.

Hayasaka: “Are you alright, Brian…?”

Brian: “Yeah, I’ll be fine. Sure, I still hear a little ringing in my ears, but I’ve managed much worse, haha.”

Hayasaka: (“How worse exactly…?”)

Brian: “Oh, Hayasaka: over there.”

As Brian motioned down the hall, Hayasaka saw the furthest karaoke booth’s door was slightly ajar. Sharing a look of inquisition, the two decided to check inside.

Ena: “Salutations, my suited-up gentlemen! What brings your glassed eyes to this realm on our search-out?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Ena… were you the one to open the door to this booth?”

Ena: “Oh no no no! I was merely looking around with Moony when I found this open door beckoning me inside, and I was entranced to slip in to learn the mysteries of the kah-ray-oh-kay bahr!”

Moony: “Why’re you still pronouncing it like that?”

Brian: “Looks like someone must’ve been inside here previously, huh?”

Brian pointed out the sum of alcohol bottles laid out on the table in the middle of the booth, and Hayasaka stepped over to garner a closer look.

Hayasaka: “They’re all empty… Perhaps someone was drinking inside here?”

Ena: “Oh ho ho! Not even I need intoxications like these to become, as you may say, tispy!”

Moony: “Don’t say that like it’s a perk…”

Hayasaka: (“Despite the notion that no one should've had any association with the karaoke bar, these bottles prove otherwise… In that case, it’s best I remember this.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Empty Alcohol Bottles

Hayasaka: “Right then… do you have anywhere in mind we should look next, Brian?”

Brian: “Me? Well… I was maybe thinking the stage bar next door. Considering that was the place Retsuko was last seen, there’s a chance a clue could’ve been left behind.”

Hayasaka: “That’s not a bad take, haha…”

However, just as Brian was about to push open the door for their departure, a loud, thrilling metal instrumental boomed from the speakers, startling the two into a frenzied halt. Whipping his head around to the source, Hayasaka witnessed Ena who had been previously meddling with the karaoke machine, now melted into their sad form.

Ena: “O’, O’ dear! Oh no no no! I didn’t mean to do that! Uwaaaa!”

Without hesitation, Moony bounced onto the control panel, abruptly causing an end to the screeching noise.

Moony: “Ena, what in Great Runas’ name were you thinking?!”

Ena: " *sniff* , I-I didn't choose that scary noise… It had begun to scream from the forbidden box when I pressed the colourful buttons I just couldn't not touch!"

Hayasaka: ("That's odd… Was that song playing just a coincidence…?")

Brian: "Um, well, we were just heading out this way now! So… good luck on your investigation?"

Brian then frantically ushered himself and Hayasaka out of the karaoke booth before another word could be uttered.

Hayasaka: ("I can't blame Brian. I think he's been through enough speaker-related frights for one day…")

Brian: "L-Let's just get out of here already…"

With that, the two left the karaoke bar and walked across to the stage bar. Comparing it to the setup from the previous time he'd been here, Hayasaka could conclude from a glance that nothing major had changed. As they moved closer to the bar side however, they were greeted with a multitude of bottles and glasses, ranging from empty to half-empty: some completely full despite being opened. Others were even just lying in the trash. The malty scent evaporated into Hayasaka's nose, making him wince.

Hayasaka: ("They could've at least cleaned up after themselves…")

Running a light finger across the bar top, a familiar unfavourable build-up in his chest arose.

Hayasaka: ("I can't help but be reminded of a few nights ago, where I had watched the two drink… It was only a few nights ago… and yet Retsuko was alive… Why did this have to happen?")

Brian: "Hayasaka!"

Hayasaka: "Ah–!"

Brian: “Oops! I-I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you…”

Unbeknownst to Hayasaka, Brian had trailed off behind the bar, only to pop up on the opposite side of the counter.

Hayasaka: “Haha, i-it’s fine… What is it?”

Brian: “I found these in a nearby trash can… I think they’re laxatives? That’s what it says on the box, anyway.”

Brian handed the box over to Hayasaka, who immediately picked up on the odd lightness of the package. Flipping open the cardboard, he was bemused to find it empty. Turning the box around, he read the contents.

Hayasaka: “...I see. These are standard laxatives, according to the description.”

Brian: “Do you think it came from the pharmacy?”

Hayasaka: “Seeing as it’s the only place so far to provide any sort of drug, then I have to assume so.”

Brian: “But then, why were they here of all places?”

Hayasaka: (“Something else might’ve happened here at the bar… And yet, it’s strange that not even the blister pack is present…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Empty Box of Laxatives

Proceeding one last scan around the area, the two assumed that was the most they were going to find. Leaving the stage bar, they bumped into another duo, one of which half-dragging the other along with him in usual fashion.

Kaidou: “C’mon, Saiki! We don’t have time to lose!”

Saiki: “ *That pill made you way too eager… Did they put sugar in yours or something* ?”

Kaidou: “Oh! Mr. Hayasaka!”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Kaidou… Aren’t you two supposed to be looking around for sharp weapons?”

Kaidou: “Yep! Me and Saiki were just about to return to the karaoke bar to report our findings. After scouring both islands top to bottom, we found that a knife had been stolen from the kitchen!”

Hayasaka: “Ah? And how can you tell?”

Kaidou: “ Heheh… You see, using my highly skilled foresight and sixth sense of the Jet Black Wings, I barely needed to unleash my true power to sight the truth of the case…!”

Brian: “Huh?”

Saiki: “*... We saw there was a knife missing from the knife rack* .”

Brian: “Oh, why didn’t you say that in the first place?”

Kaidou: “U-Um, well, what I said was basically the same thing, y’know!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear…”) “Thank you for the information, anyway.” (“Although, a missing knife isn’t something I can let slip by lightly. Where could such a thing have gone…?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Missing Kitchen Knife

Kaidou: “So what were you two doing in the stage bar?”

Brian: “We were just trying to look for any clues related to Retsuko’s drinking with Bojack, really.”

Kaidou: “Hmph. Those two and their drinking… It’s so irresponsible for adults to drink – it always leads to them acting weird and passing out, and here it was no different.”

Saiki: “ *I take it you’re never going to drink then* .”

Kaidou: “I’m never gonna taste a drop, even when I turn 20!”

Brian: “That I can agree with… Even if I’m already of age, me and alcohol don’t sit well together. The only time I did get drunk, I was sick immediately after…”

Hayasaka: “T-That’s certainly one reason why you shouldn’t drink, haha…”

Shaking off the trivial topic, Hayasaka suggested they return to the karaoke bar to check up on Kurumada and L’s experiment. Coincidentally, the two had just arrived back in the lobby with the microphone basket when the group stepped inside.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Kurumada, what did you find out?”

Kurumada: “After a hell of a strain of testin’ all the mics, turns out only one doesn’t seem to work. Mr. Detective over there even made me check it twice just to make sure it wasn’t a technical buff or something.”

L: “And regarding the missing microphone I had aforementioned, it was found in the furthest booth by Ena. Although, I knew that mystery was hardly as important in the end.”

Ena: “It is always a pleasure to help!”

Saiki: “ *Was that even a compliment* ?”

Hayasaka: (“Huh… So, we have a broken microphone? Why so? And how? Or, was it always just like that in the first place? If L went through all that trouble, it’s best to keep it in mind.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Broken Microphone

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Kehehe… Feelin’ fresher, everyone? I can certainly sense it – the scent of a riled up group o’ scoundrels sure is mouth-waterin’! In that case, seein’ that time’s up, get your asses over to Nesos Park on the first island. I think ya know by now what’s comin’ next…”

Following the announcement, Hayasaka brought his arms over his chest, hands cupping his elbows.

Hayasaka: (“I really hope that was enough time to check over everything again…”)

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. Ya ready to go?”

Glancing over at Kurumada, he affirmed with a hesitant nod. As they began to vacate the karaoke bar, Hayasaka felt a presence trailing one or two steps behind, too afraid to pass or accompany them. Stealing a peek behind him, Hayasaka stopped in his tracks with a creased brow.

Hayasaka: “Brian…”

Brian: “Ah, hey. I-I didn’t know if I should, um…”

Hayasaka: “You can walk with us if you want, Brian.”

Eyes lighting up for a moment, Brian sped up his pace to catch up with the two, and gave a lopsided smile.

Brian: “T-Thanks… This is sort of like last time, huh? How all three of us kinda walked from the beach to the park?”

Kurumada: “Well, if ya count being a few ways behind us, then sure…”

Regrouping with everyone at the park, Hayasaka couldn’t shake the stark absence of any chatter or talk from anyone which would typically soothe his nerves. It was almost as if they had all been stunned into patient silence despite participating in only one trial before.

Latte: “...Come on, everyone. Let’s be brave for Retsuko’s trial, alright?”

Bojack: “You’re just saying that because you’re a teacher. You can cut the nonsense for the adults.”

Latte: “But I’m not *just* saying it – I truly believe in my words, and there’s always the chance someone can benefit from them.”

Mai: “I for one can. I wish to find Retsuko’s killer so I can atone for my mistake…”

Hayasaka: (“Mai’s really adamant in blaming herself for Retsuko’s death… A little too much, honestly. But, I know she’s just being genuine…”)

Ena: “It is a long way down the rabbit hole, and you won’t be able to come back up to breathe once you make it to wonderland!”

Yuri: “Such a lovely prose… One I can definitely agree upon.”

Jesse: “What the hell kinda poetic crap is that s’posed to mean?”

Monotora: “Hmhmhm! Made it all in one piece, everyone?”

Hayasaka shifted his attention off the group to spot Monotora striding around the back of the fountain, each paw outstretched in such a way that all claws glinted sharply against the bold rays of the sun. It made Hayasaka question if their claws were always on clear display, feeling his feet slip closer together.

Monotora: “I believe this trial’s gonna be a real fun one, eh? I sure as hell don’t wanna wait around to find out!”

They then slammed onto the rouge cobblestone tile once more, and Hayasaka held his ground as the earth shook to allow the hidden pathway to come into clear.

Monotora: “Man, if ol’ furry lady wasn’t so small, then she prolly would’a had more than an ounce of fightin’ chance against the killer. What a damn shame – kehehe!”

Practically choking on their own snide chuckle, Monotora fled from the group.

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka…”

Hearing his whisper, Hayasaka turned to Brian.

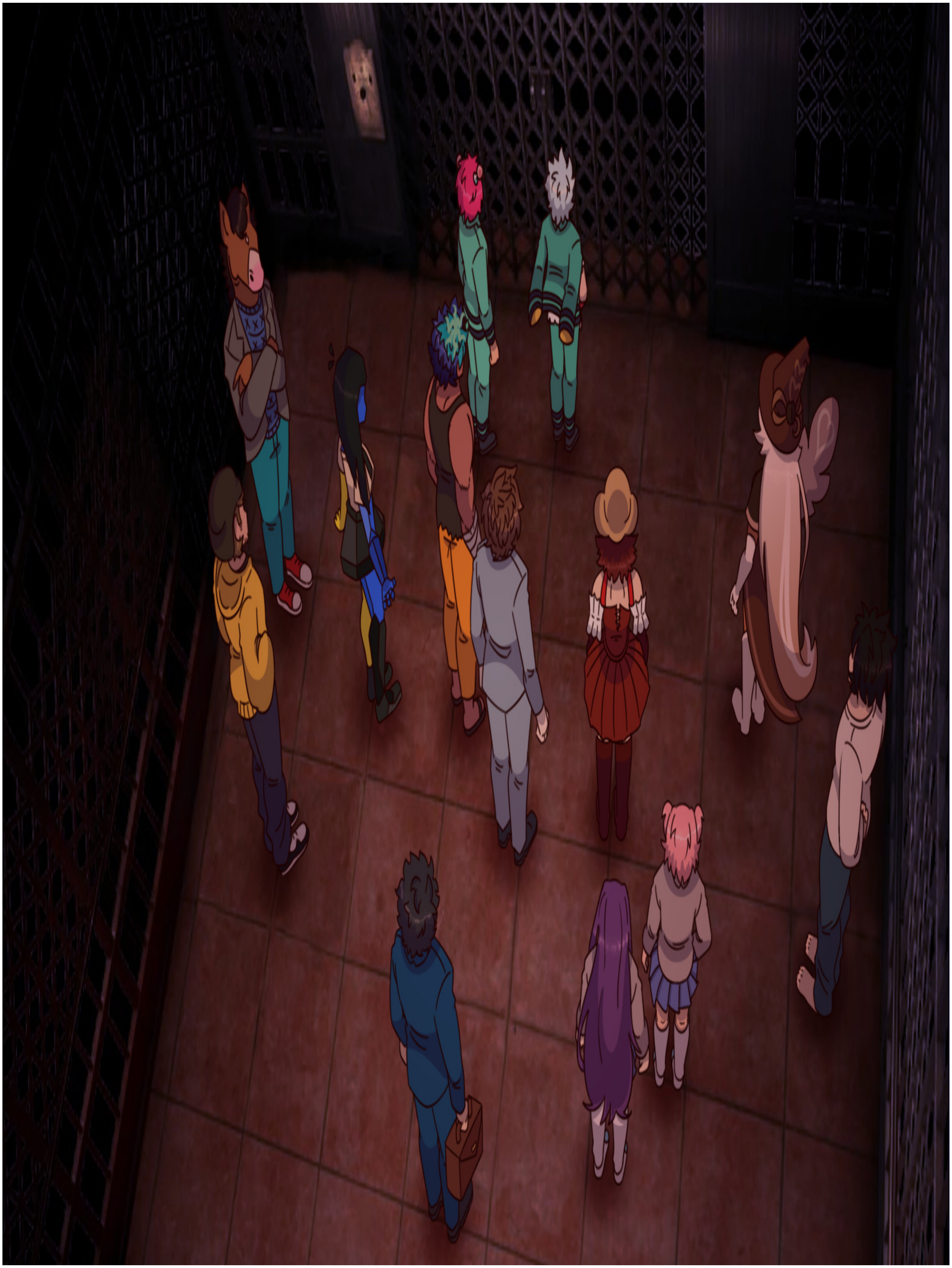
Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Brian: “I’m… going to try and speak up more in the trial this time.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Just, don’t strain yourself, alright? I’d rather not speak much at all myself, haha…”

Kurumada: “Oi, we should get a move on. Everyone’s already headed down.”

Glancing at Brian one last time, the former tried a nod and a firm smile despite the ever so subtle waver in his eyes. But Brian was trying, so he knew he had to as well. Rubbing the back of his neck, Hayasaka picked up his feet and followed the pack down the stairs and towards the elevator. And, as like last time, once the final person had stepped on, the metal cage began to descend.



One of the initial things that struck out to Hayasaka was that even with only two people gone, the inside of the enclosed space felt a lot emptier. It was already isolated with the tall metal gates gushing cold air past his face as it rode down, but now it only felt worse, more desolate.

Hayasaka: ("I can only hope this doesn't become a recurring thing… And yet, what if *I* became a victim in the future? Knowing how someone as defenceless as Retsuko was victimised, who's to say I can't be a possible target next…? Even if I… N-No, stop thinking like that. I can't make room for thoughts like that right now. It just won't be fair on her.")

Kaidou: "Hey, is it just me, or does this feel like it's taking longer than last time…?"

Yuri: "No, I feel it as well. Although, perhaps that's just my own nerves acting up again…"

L: "In such a claustrophobic space, it's easier to lose track of time. It shouldn't be too long now."

As such, Hayasaka felt his weight gradually shift back down as the elevator dropped to a halt. The doors parted and the light on the other side tinted his face in a soft pink-purple glow.

Natsuki: "... *Pink* ?"

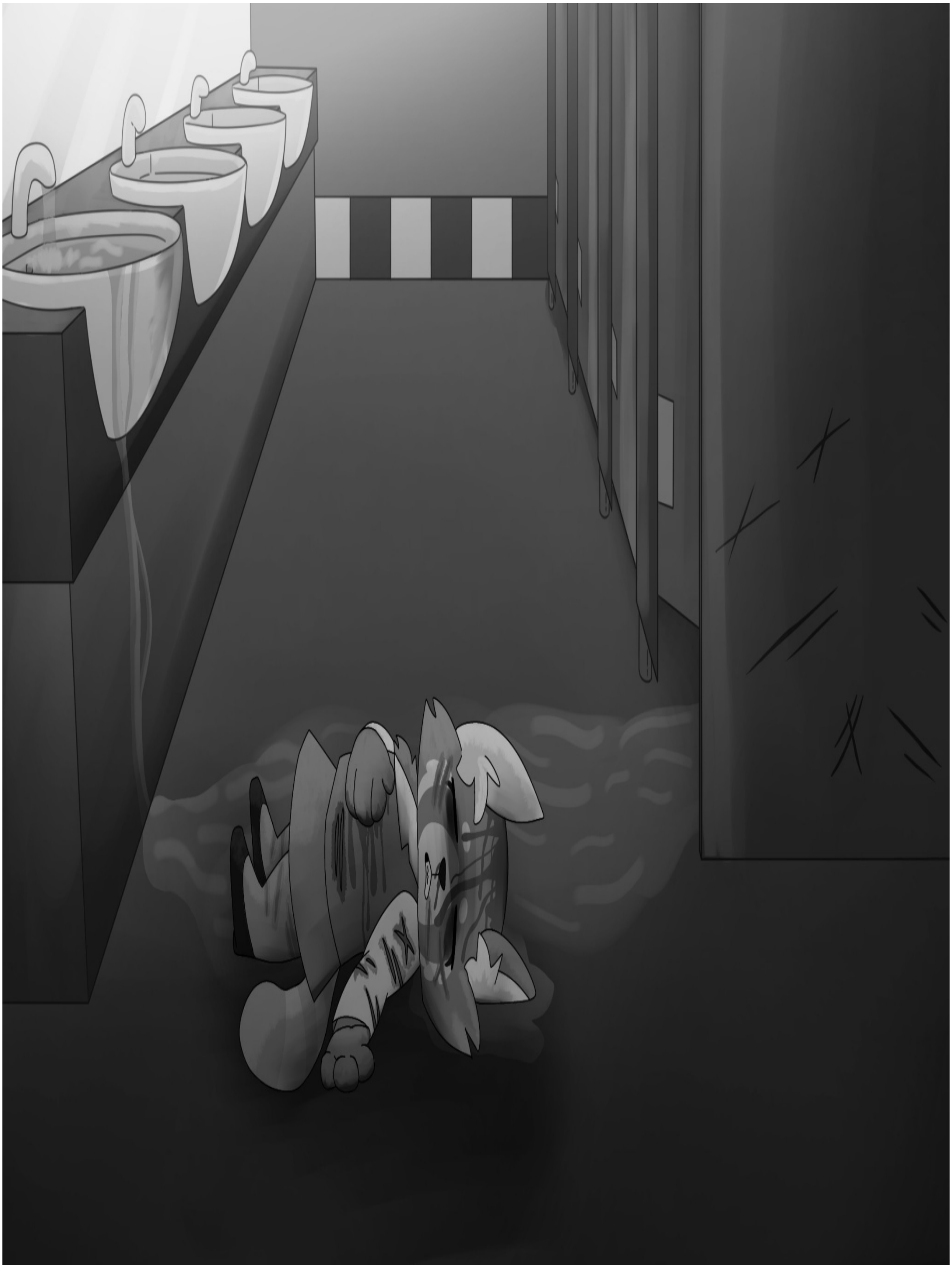
Jesse: "The hell happened to the water, yo?"

Mai: "It's not just that: I think I see different species of fish swimming around the glass…"

Monotora: "Mwehehe, like the renovations? S'just lights, mind you. Apparently it helps to reset your brain from events of the last trial if we spice up the scenery just a lil'. Anyway, I ain't here to watch you all gawk at the glass, so get to ya damn seats already!"

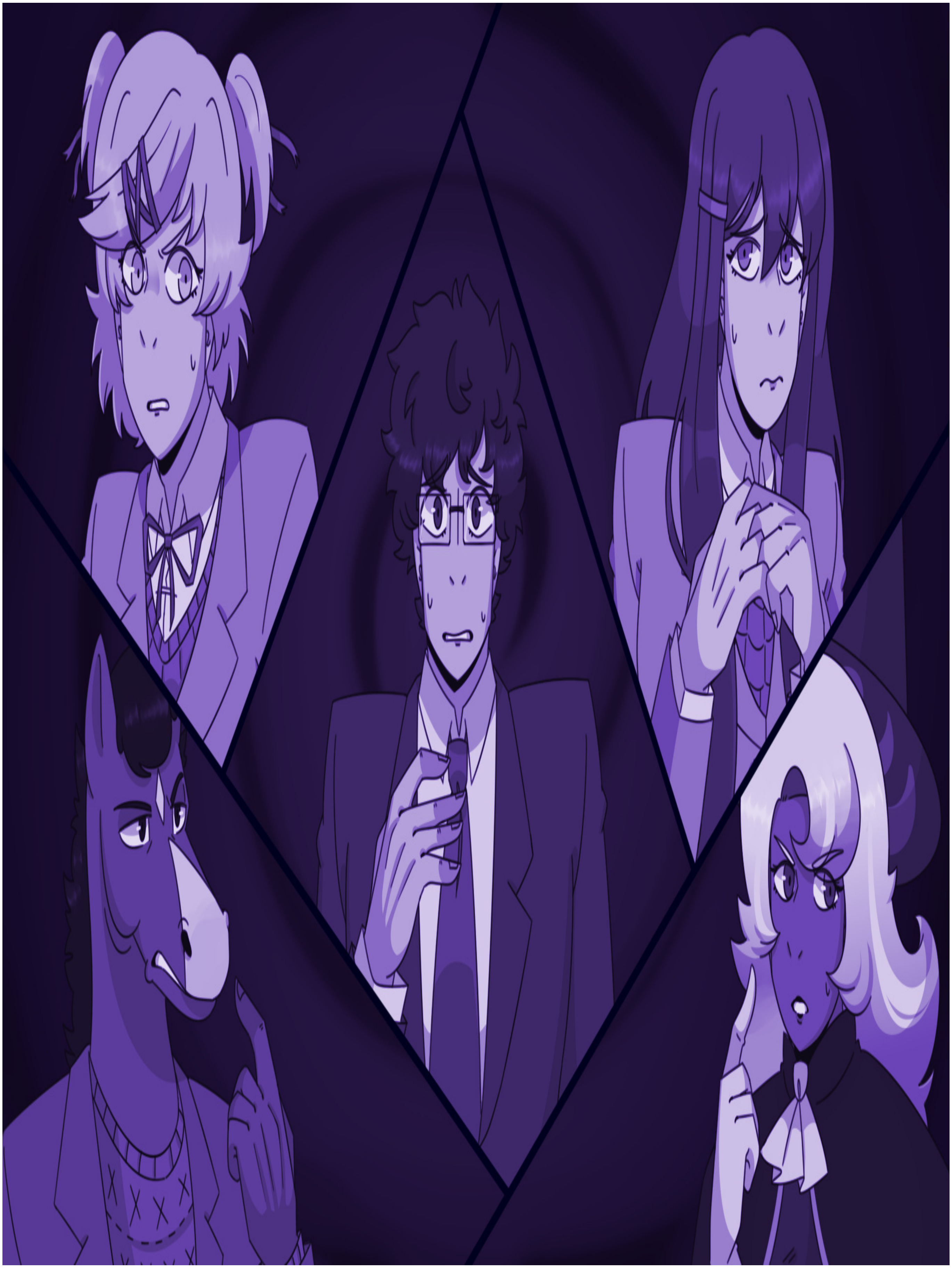
Approaching his podium for the second time, Hayasaka couldn't help but stare at the two new portraits seated amongst the group. Paying an extra moment's worth of attention to Retsuko's, he exhaled a jittered breath.

Hayasaka: (“To think, she had only invited me to coffee a few days ago… Now that’ll never happen again.”)

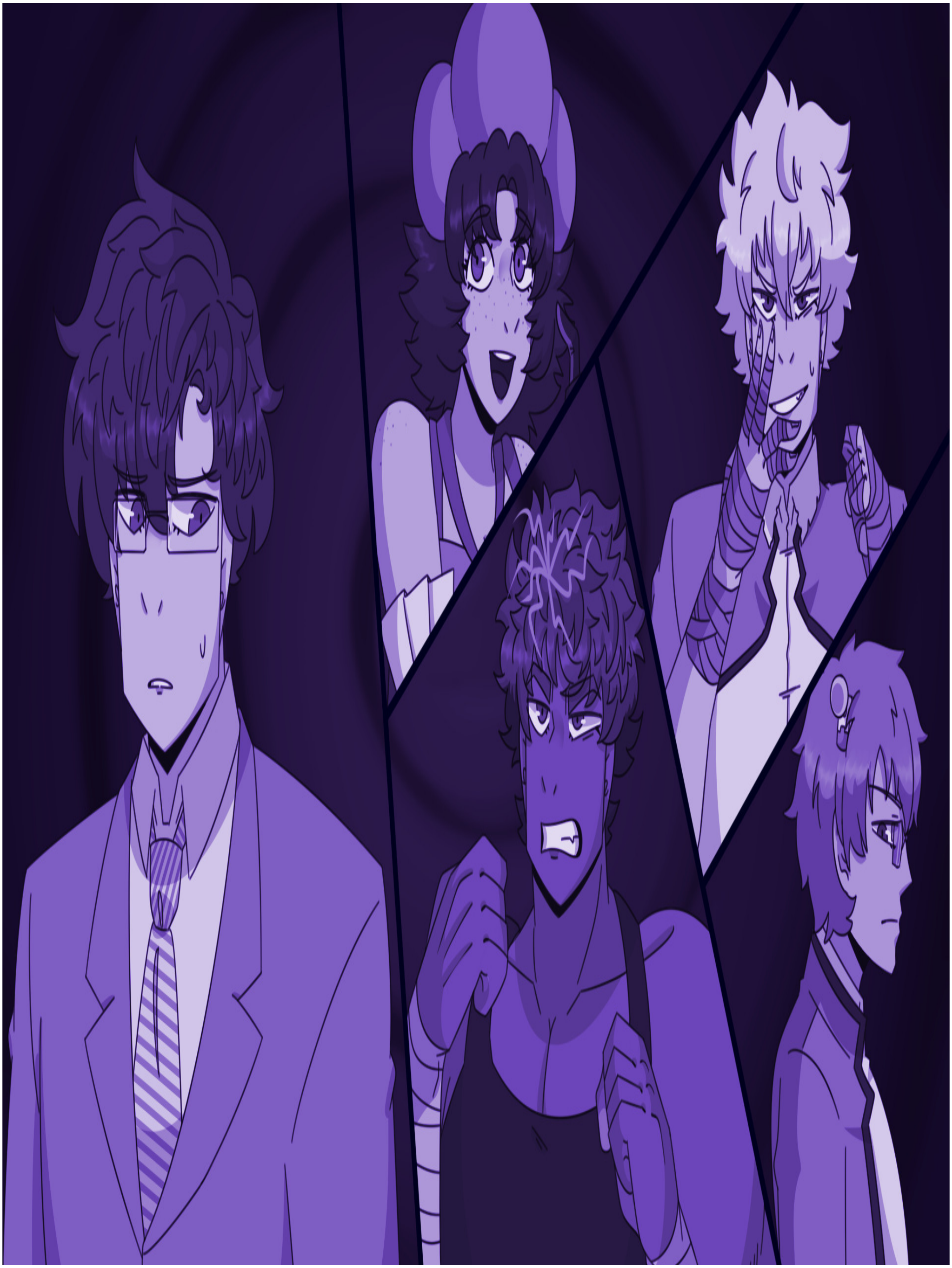


Hayasaka: (“Retsuko… Formal, responsible, polite… All etiquettes of the usual office employee, and yet her kindness was definitely one of her strong suits. Despite her… unhealthy coping mechanisms that sprouted up as the death game went on. But does it all have any meaning now? Does it have any meaning now that she’s *dead* ?”)

Hayasaka: ("Whoever killed Retsuko… Why? Why did you do it? What did you gain from such an act?")



Hayasaka: ("Do you think you're going to get away with this? Do you *want* to get away with this? Haha, no… It's useless to question it.")



Hayasaka: (“Because I dread to find out who it is. I don’t want anyone else to die. But I know as long as Nesos permits it, I have to accept my fate.”)

It was then when Hayasaka conceptualised the thought that he could not escape.

The next executive trial had begun.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like the suit n' specs duo are gettin' a little closer huh?
So, now I open the board to you for those funny little theories! I love reading them all!

Chapter 2: Sinning Swimming Dying Diving (Executive Trial)

Chapter Notes

Wazzup yo? We do be back on our BS to bring you the next trial!

Now, another show has been added to my Netflix roster - Better Call Saul. I'm actually re-watching s1-5 to refresh myself for s6 (I'm near the end of s4 right now and I'm very afraid lmao,, Kim girlboss)

Just before we begin, I need to disclose a trigger/content warning for depictions of self-harm/reference to self-harm - that's all.

Anywho, let's dive right in and convict a killer !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With their lives threatened with the deadly motive, Hayasaka is faced with a second victim of this island killing game. Being the harmless Retsuko no less, confusion and sorrow hang rife amongst the group. But what everyone wants to know the most, is who was the monster that had murdered her?

TRUTH BULLETS

NESOS FILE 2

The victim is Retsuko. The time of death is 1:00A.M. approx. The body was discovered in the women's bathroom in the Karaoke Bar of the 2nd Island. The victim has suffered cuts to the body and face, as well as an open stab wound in the chest. Additionally, blunt force trauma has been inflicted to the victim's head.

RETSUKO'S HEAD WOUND

A bloody and open wound located on the top of Retsuko's head. As it is deep, it has been questioned why such a heavy blow needed to be dealt considering Retsuko's small stature.

STAB WOUND AND CUTS

Multiple slash wounds have been found over Retsuko's body; it has been noted that they're all random in size and location. Additionally, there is a large stab wound in Retsuko's chest. However, the clotting of the wounds is irregular, as it is not present.

BLOOD ON RETSUKO’S CLAWS

Spots of blood were found on Retsuko’s claws. It has been confirmed it is not blood from seperate wounds, therefore it has been theorised Retsuko had drawn blood herself.

SCRATCHES ON BATHROOM WALLS

Scratches were found across the bathroom walls. The karaoke bar seemed new upon initial investigation, therefore it’s unlikely the bathrooms had originally been vandalised like this.

RUNNING BATHROOM TAP

Upon discovering Retsuko’s body, the nearest tap was found left on, overflowing the sink and spilling water over the counter. It is uncertain whether the perpetrator of the act was Retsuko herself or someone else entirely.

BLOOD ON BATHROOM SINK

A mark of blood was found on the overflowing sink. It is oddly smudged and somewhat faint, most likely due to being cleaned off by the water.

CLOGGED BATHROOM TOILET

In the nearest bathroom stall, the toilet was found clogged, causing the water to overflow and flood the surrounding floor. It appears that an abundance of toilet paper was forcefully shoved into the bowl.

EMPTY ALCOHOL BOTTLES

Inside the farthest karaoke booth, a collection of empty alcohol bottles were found lying on the table. This implies that someone may have been drinking in the room, but it is unclear who.

BROKEN MICROPHONE

Out of all 16 microphones, one seems to be broken. Additionally, another one was originally missing but found in the same karaoke booth as the alcohol bottles.

BLOOD ON LOBBY CARPET

A dried blood stain was found in the carpet of the karaoke bar lobby.

EMPTY BOX OF LAXATIVES

A box of laxatives were found in a trash can in the stage bar. It is odd to note that the box is empty; not even the blister pack has been found present. It is assumed to have come from the pharmacy.

MISSING KITCHEN KNIFE

A knife had been reported stolen from the knife rack from the kitchen. It is uncertain where the knife is currently.

BOJACK'S ACCOUNT

Bojack claims that he and Retsuko were drinking into the late hours of the night at the stage bar, but at one point Retsuko had excused herself to go do something. From her wording, it was most likely that she wanted to use the bathroom. At some point after this, Bojack passed out.

YURI'S ACCOUNT

The days before the murder, Yuri would usually read in the library. Sometimes as she left late at night she could hear noise coming from the karaoke bar but was too afraid to investigate by herself.

MAI'S ACCOUNT

Mai planned for the girls to have a 'girl's trip' at the karaoke bar, inviting them all a day in advance. The night before, she and Latte claim to have been together in Latte's dorm room the whole night.

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: ALL RISE!

Monotora: “Well then, prey, looks like you’ve all made it back for round two, eh? Heheh, oh what fun will spring from such tense air… Now then, just to spout the rules to make sure the thick ones are on the same page, you’re all gonna be presentin’ your arguments for who you think the blackened is, and proceed to the vote once a conclusion has been made. If you vote correctly, only the dirty blackened will be punished. But if you all slip up, the blackened gets home free and the rest of your dumb asses are gettin’ sent to the slaughter house – ran by yours truely! Kehehe!”

Kurumada: “Damnit… Back here again with these same crazy rules.”

Mai: “Now, now, Kurumada. Don’t complain next to Retsuko’s portrait. She can hear you, you know…”

Saiki: “ *Do you think her soul channelled into that picture or something* ?”

Ena: “Oh, oh, I can hear her! Miss Retsuko’s unnerving spirit!”

Kaidou: “S-Seriously?!”

Latte: “I think what Mai’s trying to say is that we shouldn’t complain about our current situation, and focus on solving this case for Retsuko’s sake.”

Natsuki: “So, where do we start this time?”

Bojack: “You said it yourself: let’s just use the time to cut down the alibis and get this over and done with. I’m not in the mood for this right now.”

L: “Yes, I suppose the time may be a given factor. However, unlike with the previous case, we were all awake due to the motive, therefore it's not something we can simply rely on alone.”

Yuri: “Even so, didn’t the Nesos File state that she died at 1A.M.? Isn’t that an hour after the nighttime announcement?”

Kaidou: “Oh yeah – Monotora would’ve been patrolling during that time! Does that mean they’re a potential suspect too?!”

Monotora: “Kehehe!”

Kurumada: “Quit laughing, asshole!”

Mai: “Oh, I see. So whoever was on the second island at the time has to be the most suspicious, hm?”

Natsuki: “And who in their right mind is gonna admit such a thing now?”

Brian: “But… Retsuko being at the karaoke bar. There has to be a reason for that, right?”

Hayasaka: (“Brian…”)

Ena: “Why oh why was she at the kah-rae-oh-kay bar?”

Latte: “As far as I knew, I didn’t think Retsuko had any affiliation with the karaoke bar, apart from Mai inviting her with the rest of the girls to come the next day.”

Jesse: “Then why the hell was she there the night before?”

L: “Instead of trying to answer that so soon, perhaps it’s better to ask: what had Retsuko planned to do that night regardless of the karaoke bar?”

Hayasaka: (“We know that, don’t we?”) “...Wasn’t she drinking with Bojack at the stage bar?”

Kurumada: “Drinkin’ together every damn night, and I remember yesterday was no different.”

Bojack: “And? So what if I was?”

Natsuki: “You don’t think that makes you suspicious?”

Saiki: “ *He was obviously one of the last people to see Retsuko before she died…* ”

Kaidou: “Does that mean he could be the killer?!”

Bojack: “That doesn’t prove anything – you’re just jumping to conclusions.”

Mai: “But isn't it possible that by inviting Retsuko out to drink so much, you could’ve essentially lowered her guard enough to strike at the perfect moment?”

Yuri: “That does sound a little plausible…”

Ena: “How cruel! Bad horsey!”

Jesse: “That’s bullshit! There’s no way he could’ve done that!”

Bojack: “Yeah–wait, what? How do *you* know that?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear. I do understand why Bojack may seem suspicious, but does that mean he’s the killer? Let’s just start with what I know for now…”)

BOJACK’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t think that theory is possible, either. According to what Bojack told us during the investigation, Retsuko had excused herself at some point to go somewhere else while he stayed at the stage bar for the rest of the night.”

Natsuki: “How do we know he isn’t lying? He could’ve attacked her at the stage bar and moved her body or something.”

Brian: “I don’t remember seeing any blood anywhere at the stage bar when we investigated earlier, though…”

L: “Do you mind telling us in detail what happened when Retsuko left? What did she say to you?”

Bojack: “Alright, god, I’ll tell you. She didn’t say a lot, but…”

FLASHBACK

Retsuko: “Ah, um, mind if I excuse myself?”

Bojack: “Leaving so soon again?”

Retsuko: “Haha, yeah. There’s just… somewhere I have to go.”

Bojack: “Can’t it wait? Are you really going to make me drink alone?”

Retsuko: “Mm… No. And you’re not going to guilt me like that, you jerk.”

FLASHBACK END

Bojack: “Like I said before, she probably went to the bathroom.”

L: “I wonder… was there any particular reason why?”

Kaidou: “Why she… needed to go to the bathroom?”

Natsuki: “That’s a really creepy question. Why do you want to know so badly?”

L: “Don’t misinterpret my intentions. I simply believe it’s a question we need to answer if we wish to solve the case.”

Hayasaka: (“If there’s a known reason why Retsuko excused herself to the bathroom, then I might have a inkling of what it is…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Kurumada: “Why’d she go to the bathroom? What type’a question is *that* ?!”

Latte: “Bojack, did she ever tell you why?”

Bojack: “No? What? What does that even mean?”

Mai: “Perhaps it was a lady crisis – she’d never tell you then!”

Kaidou: “Huh? What’s a ‘lady crisis’?”

Latte: “Don’t worry about it, Kaidou…”

Natsuki: “Then what other reason could there be? This whole conversation is weirding me out!”

Jesse: “What if **she was spiked** or some shit?”

Bojack: “What is this, a movie? That’s probably the most ridiculous theory I’ve heard yet, Todd 2.”

Jesse: “I’m tryn’a help you, asshole!”

Hayasaka: (“...That was an unpleasant conversation. To think we’d ever need to start off a trial like this is… N-Nevermind. The quicker I pick out the right part, the quicker we can move on…”)

EMPTY BOX OF LAXATIVES

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “B-Believe it or not, I think Jesse is right. When Brian and I were looking around the stage bar, we found a box of laxatives in a nearby trash can.”

Yuri: “Laxatives…? You mean from the pharmacy?”

Kurumada: “And ya sayin’ Retsuko’s drink was spiked with laxatives without her knowing?”

Hayasaka: “It would force her to go to the nearest bathroom, which was in the karaoke bar.”

Kurumada: “So how do we know this wasn’t Bojack’s doin’?”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Bojack: “Excuse me? You were there when I gave my account!”

Kurumada: “So what? Maybe you decided to leave that part out.”

Jesse: “Lay off him, man. Do you guys really think Bojack killed Retsuko? Y’know, his *friend* ?”

Yuri: “W-Well, we don’t know yet, so–”

Jesse: “No, not based on any ‘hard-evidence’ or anythin’. Just, think about it. Even if they were assholes, I could tell just by lookin’ at them. So just–I know I ain’t making a clear case or nothing, but… He liked her. And he… he wouldn’t kill her.”

Bojack: “...”

Ena: “Oh, oh! So true, my good sir! You must never take friendship for granted! I will love Moony for eons to come!”

Moony: “Aw, I’m still the gift!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Jesse…”)

L: “...Although I must say that is a touching speech, it won’t do much to help in solving the case. Fortunately, I do believe there’s a flaw in suspecting that Bojack was the one to spike Retsuko’s drink. First and foremost, what would he gain from it when he had already placed her in a vulnerable position alone with him?”

Kaidou: “Oh! Maybe he decided to follow her over to the karaoke so he could kill her in a different location to look less suspicious!”

Brian: “But aren’t the karaoke bar and the stage bar right next door from each other?”

Natsuki: “So that would be basically pointless…”

Mai: “Oh, and it’s not just that – Bojack couldn’t go into the women’s bathroom anyway!”

Bojack: “What the hell do you take me for otherwise? I’m not a creep.”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t think that’s what Mai’s talking about… You see, there’s a feature on the karaoke bar bathrooms that prevents people of the opposite sex in entering a bathroom.”

Brian: “Oh yeah, apparently you can only enter a bathroom by swiping your tablet on the reader, but it can only work depending on your sex…”

Kurumada: “Well, ya never know…”

Bojack: “I’m sorry – should I take my pants off to help you figure it out?”

Kurumada: “What?! No, dumbass! It was a fucking joke!”

Hayasaka: (“Then what was your goal in saying it at all, Kurumada…?”)

Yuri: “Um, would it not be possible for Bojack to just follow Retsuko inside before the door could close?”

L: “That would make for a viable possibility, if not for the fact that considering the two’s heights, it’d be impossible for Retsuko to not feel such a heavy presence behind her, would she not?”

Bojack: “ *Heavy* ? I hope you just mean tall…”

Kaidou: “Even if she was drunk?”

Jesse: “Maybe – if he wasn’t three times her size.”

Bojack: “Okay, now you’re just trying to get back at me.”

Jesse: “I deserve it, bitch.”

Saiki: “ *This is getting off topic…* ”

Latte: “Now I’m just a little fuddled. Can someone wrap up what this all means?”

Hayasaka: “D-Don’t worry, Latte. From what we know now, the killer lured Retsuko to the women’s karaoke bathrooms by spiking her drink with laxatives.”

L: “And, as the culprit would therefore need access to the women’s bathroom in order to attack Retsuko, it’s likely to say that the culprit is a woman.”

Kaidou: “We got a lead that quickly?! H-Heh, I mean, the Jet Black Wing’s aura must be wafting off on everyone…”

Natsuki: “How do we know a tablet wasn’t stolen or something?”

Kurumada: “Well, *are* any stolen?”

Natsuki: “...N-No.”

Bojack: “Oh, look who’s trying to deflect the blame once they’ve become a prime suspect?”

Natsuki: “W-What the hell?! I’m not!”

Ena: “So you are not a woman, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “I AM! I-I mean, I am… B-But I’m not the killer! S-So shut up!”

Yuri: “N-Natsuki…”

Jesse: “Wait, uh, Ena… Are you a…?”

Ena: “Hm?”

Latte: “I’ve been meaning to ask this myself, but, what *is* your gender, Ena? I was a little unsure myself…”

Ena: “What is a ‘gender’?”

Moony: “Ugh… Don’t you dare start this conversation again.”

Kurumada: “Well how’re we gonna know what damn bathrooms they’re allowed access to?”

Monotora: “Kehehe! I see you’re all in a mess over this painful lil’ detail, eh? This part ain’t so interestin’ to me, so I’ll just spill it: Ena has access to both bathrooms, y’know, to accommodate whatever they’re, uh, feelin’ at the time.”

Ena: “The preferences are plentiful! Thank you my kind captors!”

Kaidou: “Don’t thank the ‘captors’!”

L: “...Hm, I see. So then, that leaves Ena as a suspect regardless.”

Ena: “Oh noooo! The odds are not in my favour after all!”

Brian: “D-Do we have any further leads on how we can cut the list down?”

Natsuki: “Well it isn’t me, nor is it Yuri. We were way too tired to even function!”

Saiki: “ *Can’t the same excuse be applied to everyone else?* ”

Natsuki: “W-Well, um…”

Yuri: “...What if it was Mai?”

Mai: “... *Hm* ?”

Kurumada: “Yeah – where the hell is this comin’ from?”

Yuri: “A-Ah, it’s just that… wasn’t she the one to plan the ‘girls-trip’ in the first place? A-And she was very adamant on everyone coming as well…”

Hayasaka: (“Sure, maybe Mai was a bit pushy in inviting Yuri, as I remember, but…”) “T-That doesn’t mean she’s the killer. Do you have any evidence?”

Bojack: “Evidence? Is Retsuko’s body in the bathroom of the exact location she planned her ‘get-together’ enough evidence for you? And anyway, who even plans to sing karaoke during the middle of a ‘no sleep’ motive?”

Kurumada: “Oi, don’t get cocky now that you’re off the hook, asshole.”

Jesse: “I mean, it is kinda suspicious, yo.”

Mai: “...”

Hayasaka: “M-Mai…”

Mai: “...Hehe, don’t worry, Hayasaka. A lady can handle herself, can she not?”

Hayasaka: (“Oh dear, despite her smile, her eyes hide a fire… It’s hard to believe I’m fighting on her side here, h-haha…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Mai: “So then, what evidence do you possess that paints me as the culprit?”

Brian: “With what Yuri said about you being so pushy with inviting everyone, it feels like you needed everyone there for some reason…”

Latte: “I just think Mai didn’t want anyone to feel left out, you know?”

Bojack: “Tell that to all the guys she didn’t invite.”

Brian: “Guys… t-that’s it! Maybe she invited all the girls so they would be able to find Retsuko’s body!”

Saiki: “ *Considering Retsuko’s size… it would’ve been impossible to find her alone before we all fell asleep* .”

Natsuki: “Eh? So **it was all a trick** ?”

Latte: “It couldn’t have been so! Mai just wanted you all to be happy!”

Kaidou: “Miss Latte…!”

Hayasaka: (“...It’s not just a gut feeling anymore. I know she couldn’t have done it…”)

MAI’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “N-No, it couldn’t have been a trick. Even if you say it’s a possibility, Mai couldn’t of had an opportunity to murder at all last night, because she was with Latte the entire time in her hotel room.”

Kurumada: “Thank god, Mai, ya almost gave me a heart attack there– *wait you were where* ?!”

Mai: “Don’t act so innocent yourself, Kurumada. You told me yourself you were going to check up on Hayasaka last night too~.”

Kurumada: “That–that ain’t the same, goddamnit!”

Hayasaka: (“A-Ah dear…”)

Latte: “It’s the truth – me and Mai never left my dorm during the night.”

Mai: “Now, should that be enough to prove both our innocence, hm?”

L: “Regarding you two are not accomplices to each other, I believe it’s passible. If Mai really intended to manipulate a body discovery in her favour, it would be only foolish to choose a location that is uncommonly used by the majority.”

Brian: “Oh, um, I’m sorry about that, Mai…”

Mai: “Don’t worry, I’ll let you off this time – I can’t stay mad at someone who looks like a little bite-sized Hayasaka!”

Brian: “A-A what now…?”

Hayasaka: “L-Let’s just move on, please…”

Jesse: “So if those two ain’t possible, then don’t we only have three suspects left?”

Kaidou: “Natsuki, Yuri and Ena! The killer is amongst one of them!”

Natsuki: “...”

Yuri: “...”

Ena: “...Why are we all silent?”

Saiki: “ *Why do I have a feeling they’re completely clueless about being suspected?* ”

Jesse: “Shit, man… How do we figure out which one it is?”

L: “If none of the three possess additional backed-up alibis, then we need to move our discussion back onto the case itself in order to catch out the culprit.”

Kurumada: “So we know how the killer got Retsuko to the karaoke bathrooms, but how the hell did they attack her?”

Latte: “Do you think she was distracted somehow?”

Hayasaka: “No, I don’t think so. Unlike with Walter, Retsuko wouldn’t need a complicated distraction scheme, c-considering how smaller and defenceless she was…”

L: “Additionally, as she had been drinking previously, her reaction time would’ve been slower in such an intoxicated state. The culprit likely knew this, and used this to their advantage.”

Bojack: “Shit…”

Brian: “But, didn’t Retsuko have two fatal wounds on her body?”

Hayasaka: “Brian’s right… Her head wound and the stab wound in her chest are both likely candidates for the cause of death…”

Mai: “The stab wound seems suspicious, does it not? Retsuko could’ve easily been left to bleed out.”

Jesse: “Yeah, but there’s no way in hell you can survive havin’ your damn head caved in.”

Kurumada: “Then which one killed her, damnit?”

L: “Before we all get caught up in a dilemma, I suggest you try to remember the surroundings to see which one affected the scene of the crime the most.”

Hayasaka: ("It's unlikely both wounds could've killed Retsuko, but going by L's proposal, there's one that matches up with something at the scene…")

SCRATCHES ON BATHROOM WALLS

Hayasaka: "I believe L is referring to the scratches found on the bathroom walls. They appeared to be strangely similar to the cuts on Retsuko."

Brian: "Oh, I remember those. Actually, now that you mention it, they both kind of looked like they were made with the same weapon."

Yuri: "To make cuts like that, it'd have to be something sharp…"

Bojack: "What do you want to leave your bets on? A knife? A spare key? Broken glass?"

Jesse: "Excuse me, *bitch* ?"

Bojack: "Okay, I wasn't trying to make a reference to *that* – I'm just stating that we don't know the weapon. There were no weapons in the bathroom. From what I recall anyway."

Hayasaka: ("Although, it's more likely that we actually do…")

MISSING KITCHEN KNIFE

Hayasaka: "What if it was a kitchen knife…?"

Latte: "A kitchen knife? But wouldn't that be all the way back on the first island?"

Kaidou: "No, Mr. Hayasaka's right! Me and Saiki found there was a knife missing from the kitchen. It's way too much of a coincidence to say it isn't the weapon!"

Kurumada: “So a knife’s the weapon, eh? ‘Guess the killer had it on them beforehand.”

Natsuki: “But I still don’t get these scratches on the walls. Didn’t we say Retsuko was defenceless? Then shouldn’t the killer have easily attacked her?”

L: “It’s clear, is it not? The only explanation is if there was a struggle between the culprit and trying to stab Retsuko.”

Jesse: “Wait, why’re you just now saying ‘stab’? What happened to all those cuts and shit on her?”

L: “Because it’s not just the marks on the wall that indicate this struggle, but also the cuts on her body.”

Mai: “I see. So they were just the killer’s failed attempts to get to her chest, hm?”

Saiki: “ *It seems like a lot of work just to stab someone so small* .”

Kaidou: “Saiki’s right. Why was it so hard to, um, attack Retsuko?”

Ena: “Perhaps there was an obstacle in the killer’s path to malice!”

Brian: “But I don’t remember anything in the bathroom that could’ve done so. It was just… an open bathroom.”

L: “...There’s still one obvious impediment you’re all overlooking here.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s only because we don’t want to accept such a thing… However, if L won’t reveal it himself, I can only assume he wants us to come to the conclusion ourselves…”) “...I-It’s because it was Retsuko. Retsuko was the one to initiate a struggle with the killer.”

Natsuki: “Are you seriously trying to say the killer had a fight with *Retsuko* ?!”

Latte: “But I just don’t think Retsuko would have it in her to hurt someone…”

Kurumada: “What, and ya don’t think anyone would at least try to fight back when tryn’a be killed?”

Latte: “I’m not denying that. I just feel like it wasn’t in her nature. She’d never shown any sign of it before.”

L: “How much of Retsuko can you safely claim to really know?”

Hayasaka: “L’s right. We only knew Retsuko for a short time, if anything. A-As much as I hate to say it myself, we can’t ignore that this was the only possibility–”

Bojack: “Shut your goddamn mouth.”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “A-Ah…?”

Bojack: “Maybe *you* didn’t know Retsuko, but I sure as hell did. She’s a victim in this.”

L: “And are you attempting to engage in a rebuttal against Hayasaka of all people…?”

Bojack: “A rebuttal? You know what? I will. Because now you’ve all just pissed me off.”

Hayasaka: (“T-This doesn’t look to good…”)

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Bojack: “The only possibility? That’s bullshit. Retsuko was drunk, she couldn’t have fought back. End of story.”

Hayasaka: “W-Why’re you so sure she couldn’t? As a victim, even Walter had attempted to fight back against Hiroshi…”

Bojack: “Retsuko was different. She **didn’t even have anything to fight back with**.”

BLOOD ON RETSUKO’S CLAWS

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “I-I understand that this is hard to accept, but Retsuko wasn’t entirely defenceless. She had her claws. And… And they were bloody.”

Bojack: “What…?”

L: “I had confirmed during the investigation that these weren’t from additional wounds, and so we can assume she used them to scratch someone, even going as far to draw blood.”

Brian: “S-So you were right after all…”

Bojack: “... *Fuck* .”

Jesse: “Bojack…”

Hayasaka: (“Was this the right thing to do…? It would be stupid to deny this fact, and yet I feel horrible for arguing for it…”)

Kurumada: “...Heh, so you were right. Good for her.”

Natsuki: “Good for *her* ?”

Kurumada: “I didn’t mean it like that! I’m just sayin’ she left behind a pretty easy sign of her killer. I’m sure ya know what it is, right Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, it’s alright. You don’t have to do this for me…”

Brian: “Oh, I think I know what you mean–”

Kurumada: “I wasn’t asking *you* .”

Brian: “H-Huh?!”

Monotora: “Kehehe!”

Mai: “Look at you – trying to carry on the trial in your own way! How sweet, hehe.”

Kurumada: “Damnit! Don’t make this weird!”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. He’s talking about the scratch marks* .”

Jesse: “Oh shit, that’s right. The killer’s gotta have scratch marks on ‘em somewhere. See, Bojack? It ain’t so bad.”

Bojack: “And you think the killer’s going to, what? Willingly show them off to us?”

Jesse: “Well… can’t we just make ‘em?”

Natsuki: “Don’t even think about touching me!”

Mai: “Oh, but it’s not just that. Who knows where Retsuko attacked? We wouldn’t know if it was somewhere naughty.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m going to go on a whim and say that’s unlikely…”

L: “Let’s not waste time on this pointless back and forth. For now, let’s revisit the conditions for our culprit, and make use of our current information.”

Kaidou: “So, in order to get access to the women’s bathroom, it has to be a woman, o-or Ena. And we also know this person had to have stolen a knife from the kitchen at some point!”

Yuri: “The kitchen is rather vague… Wouldn’t it be hard to pinpoint when exactly such an accessible weapon could be stolen?”

Latte: “Maybe not! There’s usually someone in the kitchen, isn’t there? Mai, do you have any idea about when the knife could’ve been taken?”

Mai: “Hm… I don’t keep track of all kitchen equipment, mind you, but I do recall seeing all knives present at least two days ago! Oh, but you can’t suspect me or Latte taking the knife because we’re in the clear!”

Kurumada: “Two days ago? That’s a damn hefty time gap.”

Ena: “I pray you do not choose me! Moony only likes food from the supest market!”

Moony: “They don’t even have ice-cream in the kitchen! What a waste of time!”

Hayasaka: (“Out of our three suspects – Natsuki, Yuri and Ena – is there a way to tell if any of them stole the knife…?”)

Brian: “...Hayasaka, didn’t we see *them* in the kitchen?”

Hayasaka: “... *Them* ?”

Bojack: “Why’re you being so cryptic? Just tell us who you saw.”

Hayasaka: “...”

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “...Yuri. We saw Yuri in the kitchen the day before the murder.”

FLASHBACK

Brian: “...Hey, Hayasaka. Do you want to have another coffee with me?”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Well, I have no want to deny…”

Brian nodded and moved to turn the coffee machine on. At one point, someone had walked into the kitchen whilst the two were occupied in a light chat, Hayasaka peering over out of curiosity to see who it was.

Yuri: “Ah… U-Um, are you two using the kitchen currently…?”

Brian: “No, not really? We’re just talking.”

Yuri: “Oh, I see. Then don’t mind me – I’m just going to make myself some tea.”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “When Hayasaka and I were having coffee in the kitchen, Yuri came inside to make herself some tea. I don’t think we were really paying attention to her at the time, either. That means she could’ve had the opportunity to steal the knife, right?”

Yuri: “T-That…”

Natsuki: “This has to be a joke, right? Are you seriously saying *Yuri’s* the killer? That isn’t possible!”

Mai: “But I do remember she was there. That was when I invited her to come along to the girls-trip.”

Natsuki: “I don’t care if she was there or not! Did you ever see her take the knife? No? Then there’s no proof!”

Yuri: “N-Natsuki…”

Jesse: “Hell, it’s not just that, yo. I mean, like, no offense, but I don’t think Yuri’s capable of committing murder…”

Saiki: “ *Are we going to forget we just proved that Retsuko, the so-called passive type, had attacked the killer with her own claws* ?”

Natsuki: “It isn’t the same thing!”

L: “I find it very interesting how you’ve suddenly gone on the defence for Yuri despite the fact you yourself were a prime suspect the same as her. Fighting for her innocence only causes more suspicion over yourself.”

Natsuki: “That’s–That’s because I *know* Yuri! She’s my friend! And I *know* she didn’t do it! Yuri, please! Help me prove you're not the killer! They won’t believe you if you don’t speak up!”

Yuri: “N-Natsuki, I don’t know what to do…”

Natsuki: “Then I’ll help you, okay?”

Yuri: “...O-Okay…”

Hayasaka: (“Oh goodness… The claim isn’t solid, I realise, but I’ll just have to see where this goes…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Natsuki: “Yuri didn’t take the knife! She isn’t the killer!”

Kaidou: “But if she’s not, that only leaves you and Ena…”

Natsuki: “I don’t care! ‘Cuz I didn’t do it either!”

Ena: “B-But it wasn’t meeeee!”

Kurumada: “This ain’t goin’ nowhere! Show us some damn evidence if you insist she ain’t the killer!”

Yuri: “But you have **no proof I went to the karaoke bar**.”

Brian: “H-Huh?”

Natsuki: “She’s right! We said the killer followed Retsuko to the karaoke bar, but you don’t know if Yuri was even on the second island! In fact the only other person we know for sure was Bojack!”

Bojack: “Hey, don’t bring *me* back into this shit!”

Hayasaka: (“While she may be right, there’s something she’s obviously overlooking…”)

YURI’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “We don’t have proof you went to the karaoke bar specifically. But you told us yourself you were at the library at the time of the murder, Yuri.”

Yuri: “...”

Brian: “That’s right – you said every evening you were reading in the library. And I bet last night wasn’t an exception.”

Natsuki: “That… Yeah, okay, she did say that–b-but who’s to say I wasn’t there with her too?”

Hayasaka: “No, that’s not possible. Think back to what Yuri had said.”

FLASHBACK

Natsuki: “Jeeze… Why did Retsuko have to be killed in the karaoke bar of all places? It feels really insignificant, honestly…”

Hayasaka: “I suppose you have a point. Did any of you know anything off about this place beforehand?”

Yuri: “...A-Actually, I think I might’ve. Sometimes when I spent the night reading in the library opposite, I’d hear… *noises* coming from the karaoke bar when I left. I couldn’t make out what the noises were exactly as it was too muffled to hear, b-but I was too nervous to investigate by myself…”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “Yuri specifically mentioned being ‘by herself’ during these visits to the library.”

L: “Additionally, it appears you made no effort at the time to mention yourself in her account. That would’ve been the wisest thing to do to lift the suspicion off you both right off the bat, however it’s clear why you didn’t say it at the time: because you simply weren’t.”

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “But… for Yuri to be the killer is…”

Bojack: “Looking more possible. That’s what I’m getting at here.”

Kurumada: “Knowin’ she was in the library at the time, she could’ve waited it out until she saw Retsuko, n’ then followed her over to the karaoke bar.”

Mai: “Of course, she’d have no trouble gaining access to the women’s bathroom…”

Jesse: “Hell, maybe that’s why there was a fight – she was a damn easy target even for Retsuko to get back at.”

Kaidou: “Then, is Yuri really the killer?”

Ena: “Oh dear!”

Hayasaka: (“More people are starting to accept it… That Yuri may be the one to have killed Retsuko… But why? Why isn’t she saying anything?”)

Yuri: “...”

Natsuki: “No… N-No–Yuri, you couldn’t have… Did you do it? Did you kill Retsuko…?”

Yuri: “T-That… No, I… I… I…”

…

Yuri: “...No, I can’t hide it anymore.”

Natsuki: “Wha…?”

Yuri: “...Hahaha… I tried so hard… I tried so hard to keep everything concealed… Everything was supposed to be wrapped up so tight, so neatly, and yet even I can’t help but let it all slip through the cracks… I just thought I'd have a chance against the weakest one here… Turns out she wasn't as weak as she presented herself to be…"

Hayasaka: "Yuri, w-what're you talking about…?"

Yuri: "...Haha… Aahaha…"

Natsuki: "Yuri…?"

Yuri: "Ahahaha…. Ahahahahahaha…. AHAHAHAHAHAHA!!"

Yuri: “Haah! It’s so bad I’ve been uncovered so quickly! I would’ve thought I’d at least get away with it for longer! Ah, but, no. Something inside me… Feels whole. As if… as if this is what I wanted. I’m *satisfied* to be identified in a way. I’m known. My name is known! And now everyone’s eyes are on me! The attention – it’s exhilarating!”

Kurumada: “What the hell… What the fuck is this?!”

Latte: “Yuri, a-are you alright? What’re you trying to say?”

Jesse: “Shit – she’s lost it, man!”

Natsuki: “Y-Yuri – what’s going on? Are you admitting to killing Retsuko?”

Yuri: “Ah, ah, please don’t get mad at me! I would never want to hurt my closest friend! What I’ve done – it was to save us!”

Brian: “S-Save you…?”

Natsuki: “W-What… But, I don’t understand. Why’re you acting like this? What’s going on?”

Ena: “It appears she has caved into the pressure to form a new her!”

Yuri: “Oh, this isn’t a new me, no… ‘It’s a long way down the rabbit hole’, isn’t that what you said? I’ve just found myself deep down there. But, I’ve no longer need to breathe. It’s as if my lungs have collapsed, and my body is somewhere new. But I am still alive.”

Ena: “Uuuu… T-That was not what I meant!”

Yuri: “Ah, that’s a shame then… But, it’s not like I care anymore.”

Natsuki: “How long… H-How long have you been like this here?”

Yuri: “Perhaps this is all thanks to that library… Spending time there allowed me to immerse myself into my favourite books once again. Books are a parallel to the real world in a way. Fiction that reflects morals and symbols of our modern society.”

Bojack: “That still doesn’t explain your batshit shpiel back there.”

Yuri: “You see… upon reading these books – ones where people would be hurt badly due to their own downfalls – it made me reflective of my current situation. I was afraid. No, petrified of what would happen to me and Natsuki. Not just in the death game in general, but right then during the motive. We’re just two highschool girls, still growing, nourishing… It was hardly a fair game when it came to the survival of no sleep. We were at a disadvantage.”

Kaidou: “B-But you weren’t the only ones struggling! A lot of us were!”

Yuri: “I don’t see it that way. None of us would have been if we had actually helped each other. But, our true nature appears when threatened with our lives.”

Mai: “Is that why you decided to take the knife from the kitchen yesterday? Were you planning to commit a murder because of this?”

Yuri: “I was unsure at first. The act of taking the knife itself wouldn’t have meant anything if I had chosen not to use it. I felt safer with it than not. I finally caved in when the second motive was revealed, however. That way, I knew I could save both me and Natsuki. I could take us both away from this hell just by taking one measly life.”

Saiki: “ *Nothing she’s saying makes any coherable sense…* ”

Kurumada: “What the hell is wrong with you?! That ain’t justifiable to kill someone over! I already said that the motive was selfish as shit!”

Jesse: “And leavin’ the rest of us to die here? That’s screwed up, like fuck…”

Yuri: “Please don’t see it as a message of hate! I was only allowed this grateful opportunity thanks to Monotora and Nesos for letting me keep Natsuki safe.”

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“T-This can’t be Yuri… This can’t be, can it? She was so timid, polite, and soft-spoken when I met her… I even couldn’t help but see myself in her sometimes… And yet, she’s completely changed. I almost refuse to believe what I’m witnessing is real, haha… Is this her true nature, as she put it, or has she simply cracked under the pressure of the death game…? And, is she *really* confessing to killing Retsuko…?”)

L: “Hm… This is indeed an interesting turn of events. Although, I had acknowledged it was likely for a suspect to indeed snap under the pressure, I wouldn’t have anticipated it this early. Regardless, you *are* confessing to the murder of Retsuko, yes?”

Yuri: “Clarity is always on the forefront for people like you. Detective work must be so tiring… I’ve read a couple of novels in the past about detectives. There was even one where the detective turned out to be the murderer at the end of the book. Isn’t that ironic? …But, to answer your question, *yes* .”

Latte: “But, Yuri, I don’t understand. Why did you choose to kill Retsuko? She was no threat to you, surely…”

Yuri: “But that’s the exact reason why she made for the best target. She was the easiest to kill stature-wise, but also due to the fact that she was so simple to manipulate with her openness to her drinking habits.”

Bojack: “...”

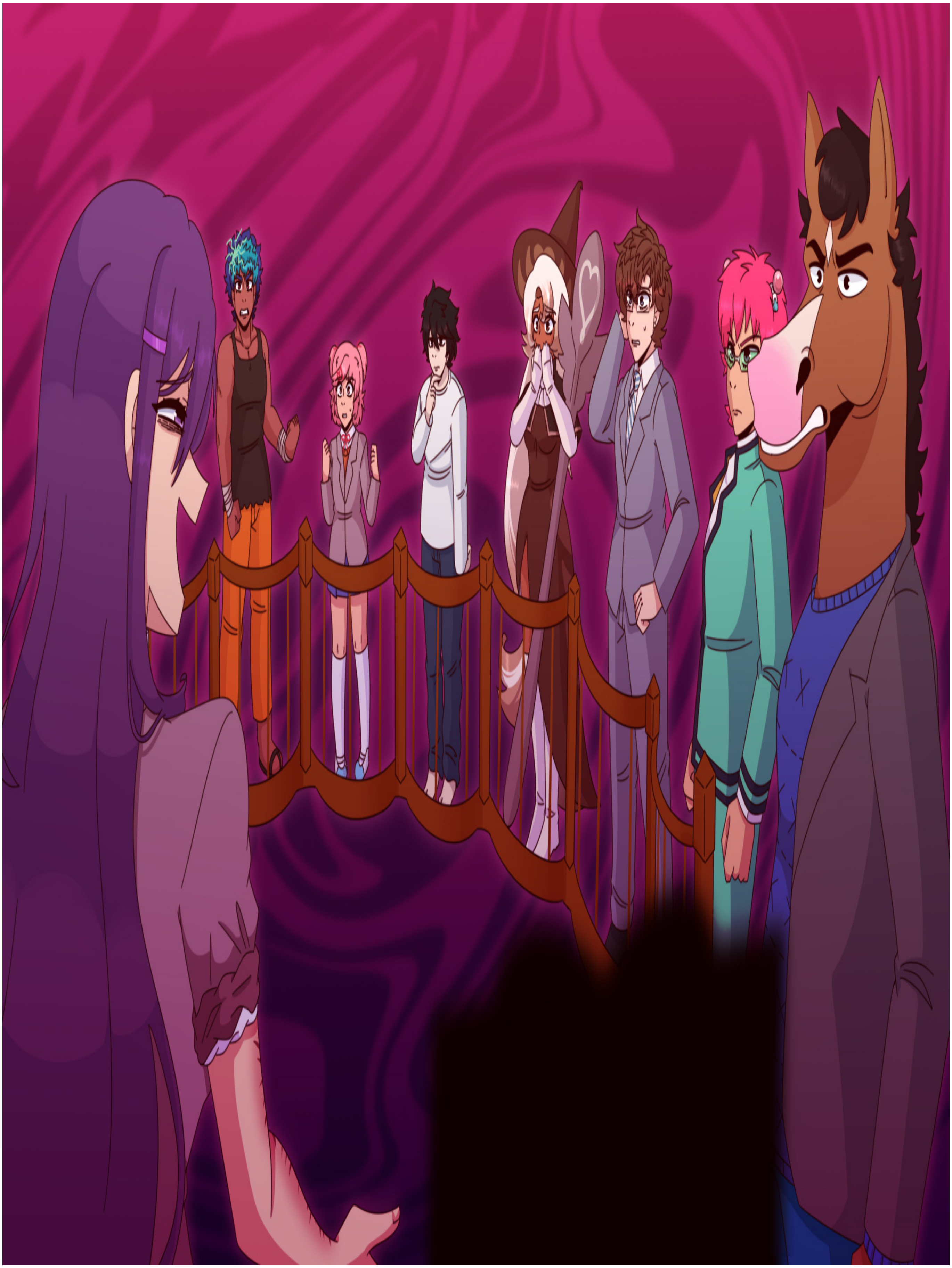
Yuri: “Spiking her drink with laxatives to lure her to the bathroom was easy to do. And once she had arrived, I attacked her with the knife. But I’m not even sure why I’m explaining this – you all had that part figured out anyway.”

Kaidou: “But then how did Retsuko manage to fight back?”

Yuri: “Even I didn’t expect her to fight back. Although, how many of you actually knew she possessed claws? Yes, red pandas are notorious for using their claws for defence, but as you all said before, it definitely didn’t seem in-character for Retsuko to do. Haha, she put up quite the nasty fight for her life. Fortunately, I managed to finish her off in the end.”

Brian: “But then, what about the scratches? Where did Retsuko attack you…?”

Yuri: “Me…? Haha…”



Yuri: “Right up my arms – do you see? I didn’t want to get blood on my blazer, but perhaps I should’ve kept it on considering how nasty she got, hahaha…”

Natsuki: “O-Oh my god! Yuri–what the hell?! I think I’m gonna throw up–!”

Bojack: “Jesus…”

Kurumada: “How–How can you show that off like it’s *nothing* ?!”

Yuri: “Because it’s the fruits of my efforts. I had to suffer in order to rid my suffering.”

Hayasaka: (“T-There’s so many cuts… So much red… Her arms must be in so much pain, and yet she holds a smile like it’s simply decoration… I can’t do it – I-I have to look away…!”)

Mai: “Why did you not think to bandage yourself up?”

Yuri: “I couldn’t find the time to. With the murder and the motive and the girls-trip coming up, I hardly had any coherent time to think about it… I suppose I would’ve eventually gotten around to it after Natsuki and I escaped the island.”

Natsuki: “G-Gh…”

Jesse: “Shit… There’s no way she ain’t the killer now. I mean she–she just showed off her fucking scratched-up arms like a damn art display!”

Kaidou: “And she wouldn’t have admitted to being the killer if she wasn’t, right?”

Saiki: “ *There would be no benefit in doing so* .”

Brian: “...”

Latte: “But what do we do now? Do we move onto the vote?”

Bojack: “We have our nutcase – I don’t see the holdup.”

Monotora: “Oh? Is this permission to start the votin’?”

Ena: “If this is the conclusion we have come to, then I do not oppose the majority!”

Yuri: “What a shame. You’re all going to vote for me so soon… There’s nothing I can do to stop my fate…”

Monotora: “Great stuff! I’m just revin’ to get it ready–!”

Brian: “W-Wait!”

Monotora: “... *Excuse me* ?”

Brian: “I-I mean–wait, please? I-I just… um…”

Monotora: “Can it, will ya? If you ain’t got nothin’ important to yab, then–”

Brian: “A willing volunteer!”

Yuri: “... *Huh?* ”

Kurumada: “What the hell’re you talking about?”

Saiki: “ *Did you really stop everything to say that* ?”

Brian: “N-No, not just that! Look, uh, how do I… H-Hayasaka, you know!”

Hayasaka: “I-I do…?”

Brian: “You know, um, when you were trying to explain to me about Retsuko wounds, and you wanted to give me a visual example of the oddity of her wounds with someone else being cut.”

L: “And Yuri is this ‘willing volunteer’ you wish to make use of, I suspect.”

Natsuki: “There’s no way you’re gonna make her show her arms again!”

Yuri: “...Even I’m a little concerned. To waste time on this when you already know I’m the killer is somewhat unnecessary…”

Mai: “Care to explain what your friend is talking about, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“Looks like I need to do a bit of explaining on Brian’s behalf…”)

STAB WOUND AND CUTS

Hayasaka: “What–What Brian’s trying to say is… Well, during the investigation, I found that Retsuko’s stab wounds hadn’t been clotted correctly, which is strange considering if she was stabbed right then and there by Yuri they should’ve been dealt with by the body’s defence system.”

Jesse: “So like, what does that mean? Biology lesson aside…”

Kaidou: “Oh, I know! If the wounds are unclotted, that means her defence system had shut down before those cuts were made.”

Latte: “What a knowledgeable answer, Kaidou!”

Kurumada: “This ain’t the time to be givin’ out praise!”

L: “But of course, he is correct. In other words, those wounds were inflicted after Retsuko died. Therefore, it is not possible for Yuri to claim Retsuko’s cause of death came from the stab wound.”

Bojack: “Wait, it’s not? Then why the hell are they there?”

Ena: “But how can it be not possible if she had shown us her bloody arms?”

Natsuki: “But… But still, that means there’s a chance Yuri isn’t the killer then, right…?”

Yuri: “...”

Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m not sure…”

Brian: “So that means it's unsafe to vote for Yuri right now…”

L: “Indeed it is. This trial requires further discussion regarding her claims of the case.”

Natsuki: “Then I wanna figure out other reasons wrong with her confession!”

Yuri: “...You’re wasting your time here.”

Mai: “Our time is not ours, you see! Is it not up to Nesos to provide our time limit?”

Monotora: “Hrm… I’ll hold out for now. Look’s like things are gettin’ real juicy! And here I thought I was gonna haft’a punish Brian for bein’ such a pest – kehehe!”

Brian: “Y-You were gonna what?!”

Yuri: “Natsuki, why do you want to put yourself through this? If everyone votes for someone else, I’ll win and we’ll leave together. Even if you do vote for me, you’ll still live regardless.”

Natsuki: “Because… B-Because you’re not the killer! And I don’t want you to die!”

Bojack: “Well then you’re going to have to do a better job than a soap opera of a performance in convincing us.”

Natsuki: “F-Fine! If Yuri claimed to stab Retsuko, but that was proved wrong, then there must be other things wrong with the rest of her story, right?”

Yuri: “...There’s nothing wrong with my account, Natsuki. I’d really hate for you out of all people to oppose me in our current situation.”

Natsuki: “Then… I’d rather it’d be me!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah god, it looks like the two are at each other in disagreement. I can sense how desperate Natsuki is in wanting to prove Yuri’s innocence… I’d feel the same if I had to defend Kurumada or Mai…”)

L: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Why is L looking at me like that? Does he really want me to interfere between them…? Urk, I suppose it’s not best to leave the two in disarray…”)

BALANCE BATTLE

Yuri: “We agreed Retsuko fought the killer with her claws, didn’t we?”

Natsuki: “We don’t know for certain that Retsuko used her claws on Yuri!”

DENY NATSUKI

Hayasaka: “Unfortunately, Natsuki, with what Yuri has shown us, it’s clear Retsuko used her claws to attack her arms.”

Yuri: “And are you denying I used my tablet to gain access to the women’s bathroom?”

Natsuki: “There’s no proof the tablets were used to open anything!”

AFFIRM YURI

Hayasaka: “According to the rules of the karaoke bathrooms, this was the only way Yuri could have accessed Retsuko.”

Yuri: “But we know I was waiting in the library at the time for Retsuko to make her way to the karaoke bar, right?”

Natsuki: “There’s no possible way you’d be able to see Retsuko all the way from the library!”

AFFIRM NATSUKI

Hayasaka: “That is true, however it’s more likely that Yuri was waiting closer to the karaoke bar than actually inside the library…”

Yuri: “It’s true – I was waiting close by ever since I spiked her drink with laxatives…”

Natsuki: “I’ve never seen Yuri ever go to the pharmacy before!”

DENY YURI

Hayasaka: “Hang on, Yuri. There’s something off about that statement alone…”

BREAK

Jesse: “Hold up, what’s wrong with what she said? I thought we agreed the killer laced Retsuko’s drink with the laxatives you found in the stage bar.”

Hayasaka: “While that is true, it’s never specifically stated *when* she planted the laxatives in Retsuko’s drink…”

Latte: “Why does that matter?”

L: “Because depending on when she did it, there is a critical flaw within this claim.”

Kaidou: “Could she have done it when they were drinking? Surely, if they were drunk, they wouldn’t see her there!”

Kurumada: “I’m pretty sure even wasted old guys have some grip on their object permanence.”

Saiki: “ *That’s quite the sleazy example* …”

Ena: “Perhaps she had concocted them into the drinks before the animals had arrived!”

Brian: “I don’t know about that. How would Yuri know which drinks Retsuko was going to pick up?”

Kaidou: “So what if all the drinks were spiked just to make sure?”

Hayasaka: “T-That sounds a bit pedantic to me…”

L: “And very much debunkable, as we only need to inquire from the partner Retsuko was drinking with if he ever felt the need to go to the bathroom himself.”

Bojack: “Yeah, no. Never tasted anything funny in my drinks. And I drank a lot. Not to say I’m proud of that. I’m just clarifying for the sake of the case.”

Brian: “Also, we only ever found one box. I’d think she’d need more if she was planning to spike all the drinks, right?”

Jesse: “And we can’t just chalk it up to some kinda luck?”

Kurumada: “If it was luck then I’d eat my damn shoe.”

Ena: “That would be a very rubbery meal!”

Mai: “I just find it a little odd why the box was there in the first place, hm? It was almost as if they were intended to be found. Surely, to cover up how Retsuko had been lured to the bathroom in the first place, wouldn’t the box be discarded completely?”

Latte: “You have a point there, Mai. It does seem strange.”

Yuri: “...Did you forget what the motive was, professor?”

Latte: “E-Excuse me?”

Yuri: “We were all denied the comfort of sleep. At the time, I was in pain just keeping myself awake. Don’t you think it’s entirely within reason that I'd forget to dispose of such a small piece of evidence so easily considering my state?”

Hayasaka: (“If that was really the case, then…”)

EMPTY BOX OF LAXATIVES

Hayasaka: “Then, how do you explain the lack of a blister pack?”

Yuri: “...Hm?”

Hayasaka: “There was no blister pack when I checked inside the box. If you claim you were so tired that you happened to simply throw the box in the trash, how come not even that was present?”

Yuri: “...”

L: “How quaint. The fact that the blister pack was removed tells me that you tried to hide the fact that potentially no pills were removed at all.”

Natsuki: “S-Seriously?! Then that means… Yuri didn’t even spike Retsuko’s drink at all?!”

Bojack: “What? That can’t be possible. Why the hell would she leave otherwise?”

Kurumada: “But it sure as shit makes her claims to have ‘killed Retsuko’ shaky as all hell.”

Jesse: “But like, what about her arms, yo? That’s gotta prove she’s the killer anyway, right?”

Ena: “So squelchy… The vision torments my mind!”

Latte: “But I just can’t believe another young student would kill someone… I just can’t find it in my heart to believe her!”

Yuri: " *Then die* ."

Mai: "What did you just say to her?"

Yuri: "That's clearly what you desire if you don't want to believe the truth. Don't vote for me, and you'll die."

Natsuki: "Argh, why the hell are you acting like this, Yuri?!"

Brian: "G-Guys! I don't think we should fight about this! If we get into a split, we're just gonna–!"

Monotora: " *Brian* !"

Brian: "E-Eep! W-W-What did I do wrong?!"

Monotora: "Nothin'! You just said the funky word!"

Saiki: " *The 'funky' word* ?"

Monotora: "Split! And y'all remember what that entails, right?"

Ena: "A debate of the scrum!"

Kurumada: "Do you guys really still think it's Yuri after what Hayasaka's said, damnit?"

L: "That's shameful on my end. Did my work not count as well?"

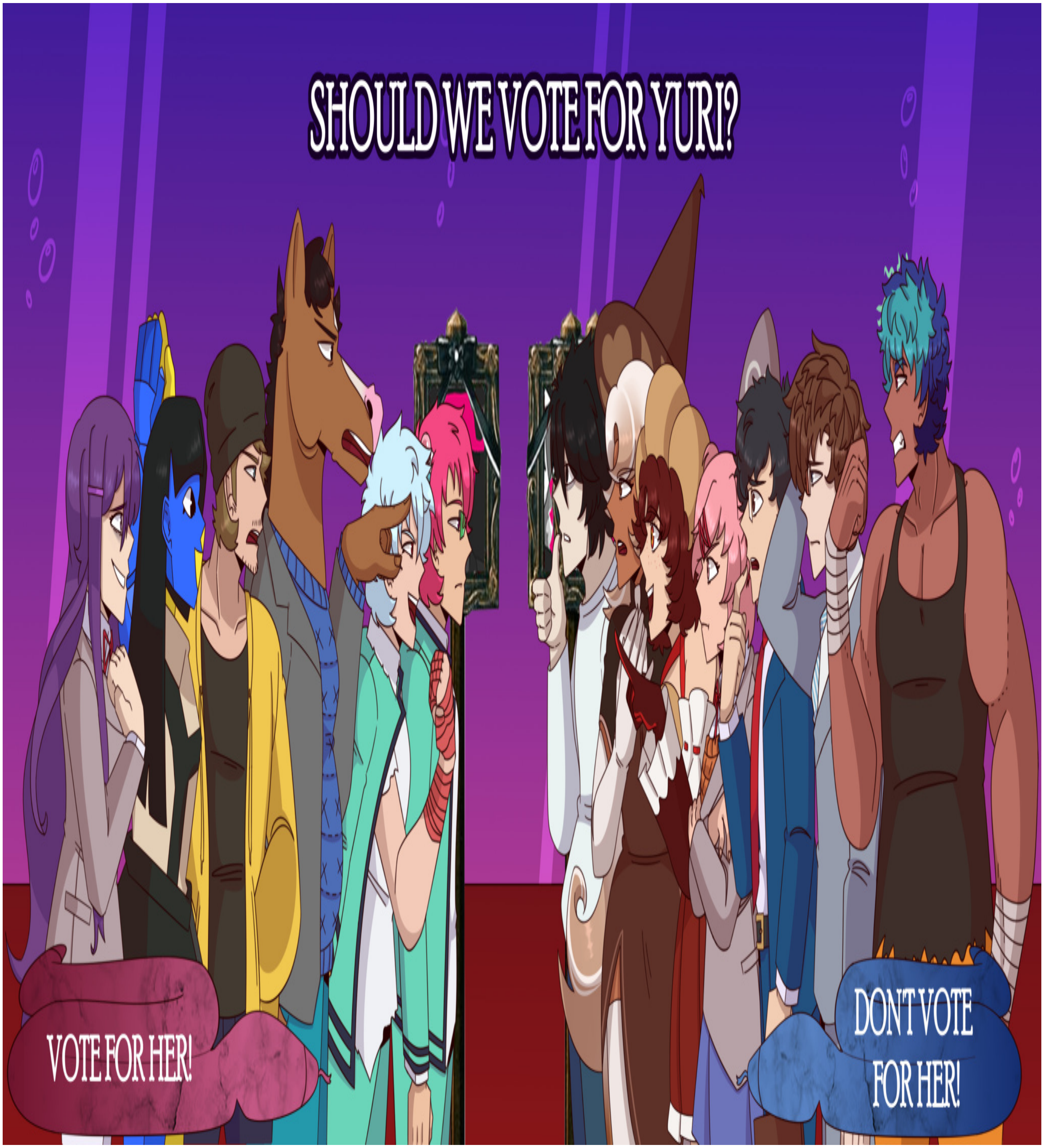
Kurumada: "You know what I meant!"

Hayasaka: (“There’s no denying that Yuri is still very suspicious… However, it’s much too unsafe to try to vote for her now. We need to be able to convince everyone to hold off, or else it may end badly for us all…”)

SPLIT OPINION

-SHOULD WE VOTE FOR YURI?-

DEBATE SCRUM START


SHOULD WE VOTE FOR YURI?
VOTE FOR HER!
DON'T VOTE FOR HER!

Bojack: “If Retsuko wasn’t spiked with the **laxatives**, then why the hell did she go to the karaoke bar?”

Brian: “The **laxatives** were probably planted, meaning Retsuko must’ve gone there for another reason.”

Ena: “But only I and the ladies are permitted to enter the **women’s bathroom**, are we not?”

Mai: “Yes, but we know it’s not impossible for men to go *inside* the **women’s bathroom**!”

Kaidou: “But Yuri confessed to taking the kitchen knife, which means she must be the one to have **stabbed** Retsuko!”

Latte: “But remember what Hayasaka said about the wounds: Retsuko was **stabbed** after she died!”

Jesse: “So what the hell do you make of Yuri’s **scratch marks**? Clearly only Retsuko could make those!”

Kurumada: “That was only ever claimed by Yuri! We don’t know the true cause of those **scratch marks**!”

Yuri: “Are you denying the only **cause of death** is not viable?”

Hayasaka: “That isn’t the only **cause of death** – we haven’t touched upon Retsuko’s head wound at all.”

Yuri: “Ah, but this is ridiculous, isn’t it? I’ve already **confessed** to the murder, so why don’t you want to believe me?!”

Natsuki: “Because what you’ve **confessed** isn’t the truth!”

CROUCH BIND

DON’T VOTE FOR HER

“This is our answer!”

FULL
COUNTER

BREAK

L: “Clearly, it is too early in our discussion to conclude on the culprit’s identity. However, this doesn’t necessarily take Yuri out of suspicion, but the method she claimed to use wasn’t the real cause of death.”

Yuri: “...”

Natsuki: “Yuri…”

Kaidou: “But what do we do now? Do we go back to our original suspects?”

L: “Knowing what we do now, previous aspects of our culprit have been altered. It’s best that we re-evaluate our case.”

Jesse: “Are you kiddin’ me? We gotta go over the whole thing again?”

Hayasaka: “N-Not everything, haha… We just need to disregard anything involving the knife and laxatives as being part of the case.”

Brian: “So that means Retsuko’s cause of death had to have been from that head wound…”

Latte: “Ah, but, where do we go from there? I’m unsure on what’s true or not now.”

Kurumada: “Yuri’s ‘confession’ screwed us up big time…”

Mai: “Hm, perhaps not. If we know the laxatives weren’t used, then luring Retsuko to the bathroom may not have been true at all.”

Ena: “But what o’ what could miss Retsuko need from the bathroom?”

Moony: “Why else would you use a bathroom, Ena?”

Ena: “I do not know! It is not my riddle to answer!”

Saiki: “ *If she really needed to use the bathroom, then the laxatives wouldn’t have needed to be used in the first place* .”

Mai: “The act of placing the laxatives there in the first place only manipulated us into believing the false narrative, did it not?”

Bojack: “Well it sure as hell sounded like it to me. You do realise I was right there when she left, right?”

L: “Can you repeat what Retsuko had said to you before she left?”

Bojack: “I already told you, didn’t I?”

FLASHBACK

Retsuko: “Ah, um, mind if I excuse myself?”

Bojack: “Leaving so soon again?”

Retsuko: “Haha, yeah. There’s just… somewhere I have to go.”

Bojack: “Can’t it wait? Are you really going to make me drink alone?”

Retsuko: “Mm… No. And you’re not going to guilt me like that, you jerk.”

FLASHBACK END

Kurumada: “It doesn’t sound like she was goin’ to the bathroom to me.”

Natsuki: “Who would even say it like that if she was?”

Bojack: “Well maybe you should’ve paid more attention if you really cared.”

Saiki: “ *Why is it suddenly our fault* ?”

L: “Regardless, from how vague her statement was, it’s possible she was planning to do something entirely different.”

Yuri: “If you claim Retsuko’s statement was vague enough to mean anything, then how can you be sure what she truly meant at all?”

Natsuki: “Yuri?”

Kaidou: “There has to be an explanation! Don’t use your dark deception on us!”

Brian: “But she said she had ‘somewhere she had to go’... Maybe she meant the karaoke bar?”

Ena: “She arrived for our meeting plenty of hours in advance! I am impressed with the punctualness of the office worker.”

Jesse: “Yeah, uh, somethin’ tells me that ain’t it…”

Latte: “But what could she have been planning to do?”

Hayasaka: (“...I have a feeling I know what it was…”)

EMPTY ALCOHOL BOTTLES

Hayasaka: “I… I believe it’s entirely possible for Retsuko to have gone to the karaoke bar of her own free will. There were empty bottles of alcohol left in the furthest karaoke booth, meaning someone must’ve been there.”

Kurumada: “So what? She ditched Bojack to drink somewhere else?”

Bojack: “Excuse me?”

Hayasaka: “More than just drinking… I think she was singing there as well.”

Ena: “That is true! Me and Moony found a microphone lying oh-so sleepily on the sofa.”

Moony: “But why did that red panda want to do karaoke so late at night anyway?”

Mai: “Maybe she was practising because she was nervous about the next day!”

Yuri: “I was horrified to perform, but not even I would try and practise on my own like that…”

Jesse: “Like that’s gonna be any help coming from you.”

L: “...Did anyone notice any odd phrases from Retsuko ever since the second island was opened?”

Kaidou: “Odd phrases?”

Hayasaka: (“...Now that he mentions it…”) “A-Actually, there was one time where I encountered Retsuko alone one evening…”

FLASHBACK

Retsuko: “Oh, I see… Y-Yeah, I get where you’re coming from. I promise to cut down, anyway. I want to focus my time on other things.”

Hayasaka: “I-I can’t tell you what to do – your choices are your own after all. But, I’m glad to hear that.” (“Although, what does she mean by ‘other things’? …I suppose it’s none of my business.”)

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “She said she wished to focus her downtime on ‘other things’.”

Bojack: “And you’re trying to tell me that means karaoke? Karaoke doesn’t feel like an ‘other things’ thing. It feels more like a ‘I’m not sure what to do with my time so I’m going to be impulsive and do this thing’ thing.”

Jesse: “Alright, Socrates, I don’t think it matters how she phrased it exactly.”

Natsuki: “Do we even have any evidence of what she actually meant, though?”

L: “Not evidence, but definitely in the form of certain claims. Thinking back to Yuri’s account to have heard noises emitting from the karaoke bar on multiple occasions late at night, combined with what Bojack said about Retsuko excusing herself on multiple occasions from their drinking sessions, I find it entirely within reason to suspect these ‘other things’ were Retsuko performing in the karaoke bar.”

Kaidou: “W-Whoa… You took two unrelated accounts and used them as evidence to prove your point! That’s amazing, L!”

L: “Why, thank you. I wasn’t expecting such praise for a mundane observation.”

Brian: “You call that mundane, huh…”

Kurumada: “So what you’re tellin’ me is that Retsuko was at the karaoke bar every damn night? Why?”

Mai: “I think the reason is rather clear. Retsuko must’ve been letting off steam from the stress of the death game. Isn’t that what you do when you beat up that poor punching bag in the sports centre, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Oi! … *But I guess you have a point* .”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…”

Latte: “So, now we know that Retsuko wasn’t lured to the karaoke bar, but rather she was already there herself.”

Ena: “She was at the wrong place at the wrong time… Oh, Retsuko! Why did you crave the urge to vocalise your chords so urgently?”

Saiki: “ *Let’s just get back on topic about her head wound…* ”

Brian: “Oh yeah, the head wound. It was probably done in the bathroom, right?”

Jesse: “I bet Miss. Tuco knows somethin’ about it.”

Yuri: “I’ve told you what happened. I stabbed Retsuko with the kitchen knife.”

Natsuki: “We get it – you’re not going to budge…”

Hayasaka: (“If Yuri won’t say anything further, then it’s up to us to figure out the cause on our own…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Bojack: “I don’t know about you, but there doesn’t feel like there’s a lot of things you can die from in a bathroom, par drug overdose of course.”

Saiki: “ *And the reward for the worst opening to a debate so far goes to …*”

Kaidou: “If there was no weapon at the scene, then the killer must’ve used their fists!”

Kurumada: “Are you sayin’ that *I’m* the killer?”

Kaidou: “N-No! I didn’t mean to imply that!”

Mai: “Although, just because the weapon wasn’t there, doesn’t mean it could’ve been hidden like how Yuri did with the knife.”

Natsuki: “I can’t really think of any blunt weapons we have access to from the top of my head, though.”

Ena: “Perhaps the weapon was hidden in plain sight again! Something that **blended into the scenery** like a painting of the geometric plain!”

Brian: “I don’t know if you could call a bathroom ‘scenery’...”

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps… it wasn’t a physical weapon at all.”)

BLOOD ON BATHROOM SINK

Hayasaka (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “Ena, I think you’re right.”

Ena: “I am? But Moony says I can never get anything correct!”

Kaidou: “Now I’m really confused if they’re friends or not…”

Hayasaka: “U-Um, with what you said about the weapon being part of the bathroom itself, I believe this may have been a sink.”

Brian: “Ah, you’re right. That bloody sink we found was probably blunt enough to cause a wound like the one on Retsuko’s head.”

Jesse: “So like, did the killer smash her head against the sink or somethin’?”

Natsuki: “G-Gross! That’s so morbid!”

Jesse: “Hey! It could’a happened!”

L: “I believe it was the other way around.”

Ena: “Retsuko smashed *the killer’s* head into the sink?!”

Latte: “I don’t think he meant literally the other way around… Unless you did?”

L: “No. You see, by looking at it from another perspective, perhaps there’s a chance Retsuko dealt the blow herself.”

Bojack: “She *what* ?”

Mai: “That seems a little… impossible, don’t you think? Why would Retsuko hit her own head?”

Yuri: “Maybe she wanted to kill herself.”

Natsuki: “Y-Yuri–!”

Yuri: “Haha, I mean if he wants to propose such an absurd idea, then why can’t I?”

Kaidou: “B-But L’s never wrong! Maybe she did somehow!”

Kurumada: “Well what the hell is it? Did she hit her own head or not?”

Bojack: “There’s no way in hell she hit her head.”

Kaidou: “Retsuko must’ve hit her head!”

Yuri: “Had she considered killing herself?”

Hayasaka: (“Not again… We’re already so far into the trial, to come to a stump like this would be bad, haha… I think someone’s onto something, but I need to be able to hear who’s saying it…”)

MASS PANIC DEBATE

Bojack: “I’m sorry, did I hear that right? Because I think you’re forgetting that there’s a killer involved in this too.”

Kaidou: “L said there’s a chance that it’s possible, so it’s gotta be right!”

Yuri: “Do you think she felt worthless for spending all that time drinking and singing?”

Jesse: “Who’s stoppin’ the killer from throwin’ her into the sink?”

Kurumada: “And what’s that chance lookin’ like?”

Latte: “I don’t think so! Retsuko was always full of positive energy!”

Brian: “W-Well, that technically wouldn’t be Retsuko inflicting the wound herself then…”

L: “Hm… around six-to-seven percent.”

Yuri: “Sometimes the smile on our faces hides the innermost feelings of our pathetic nature…”

Bojack: “Exactly. There **wasn’t anything that could’ve made Retsuko deal the blow without someone else involved**.”

Kaidou: “ *That* low?! Why did you bring it up then?”

Ena: “It’s true! I never know if I am smiling or frowning!”

Mai: “Back to the drawing board, everyone~!”

L: “Oh, I assure you that my deductions are never wrong.”

Natsuki: “Stop trying to distract everyone, Yuri!”

Hayasaka: (“...I didn’t get much out of the conversation I was expecting to be the most useful. However…”)

CLOGGED TOILET

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “A-As a matter of fact, there was something apparent about the bathroom that made it hazardous – that being it was flooded.”

Natsuki: “Flooded? By what?”

Hayasaka: “There was an, um, clogged toilet that leaked water right into the centre of the bathroom. Is it not possible that Retsuko could’ve slipped on said water?”

Jesse: “So she slipped n’ hit her head on the sink? Shit man, that’s fucked way up.”

Latte: “But wouldn’t that mean Retsuko’s death was her own doing?”

Monotora: “Bwehe! Wouldn’t that be funny? Accidents are quite an eye-catching experience!”

Kurumada: “No one asked you to speak up, asshole!”

Yuri: “However, I’m unconvinced as well. You can’t just claim she slipped on some toilet water without warning.”

Bojack: “Oh yeah, because you’re definitely the one we need to please here.”

Kaidou: “I-I think it’s possible. I mean, Retsuko *was* drunk, right?”

Brian: “That’s true – we know she was drinking in the stage bar and karaoke booth beforehand.”

Mai: “Perhaps all that drinking caused her to need the ladies room, but she was feeling a little tipsy and accidentally clogged the toilet herself. And then, without realising, she lost her footing and slipped up.”

Ena: “The drunkard had met her fate!”

Hayasaka: (“But it’s not just that, is it? There was clear evidence of something left on…”)

RUNNING BATHROOM TAP

Hayasaka: “When we discovered the body, we saw a tap was left running. If this was Retsuko’s doing, that explains why it was still on.”

Saiki: “ *She couldn’t turn it off once she was dead, obviously …*”

L: “Ultimately, this means there’s a clear possibility that Retsuko’s death was merely an accident caused by her own intoxicated actions.”

Natsuki: “T-That’s not fair! She wasn’t murdered at all!”

Monotora: “And? She still died, y’know? Death happens whether or not ya get killed, kehehe!”

Kurumada: “Well she wouldn’t have been like that in the first place if she wasn’t drinkin’ with a certain someone every damn night anyway!”

Bojack: “What? Are you saying this was *my* fault?”

Yuri: “Well, you were the one to encourage her behaviour in the first place. I’m surprised you didn’t take advantage of her as well.”

Bojack: “...”

Jesse: “Hey, what the hell, yo?! It wasn’t like Bojack knew she was gonna go to the karaoke bar at the time! Who’s to say she wasn’t plannin’ to drink in the karaoke booth anyway?”

Latte: “...But…”

Mai: “Oh? What is it, Latte?”

Latte: “Ah, it’s just… I find this a little off. Did Retsuko *really* go ahead and drink so much?”

Brian: “What do you mean?”

Latte: “Well, didn’t Retsuko say herself that she wished to stop drinking soon?”

FLASHBACK

Bojack: “Well, it was nice knowing you all. I’m gonna go drink my sorrows away now.”

Retsuko: “That makes two of us.”

Mai: “Are you sure about that, Retsuko? What about our karaoke tomorrow? All this drinking you’re doing can’t possibly be safe.”

Retsuko: “I’ll be fine, I promise. People just have… different ways of coping with things, I guess. Even if you may not agree with them. But don’t worry: this’ll be my last drink. And Bojack’s, right?”

Bojack: “Wait, why do you have to drag *me* into this?”

Retsuko: “Because I’m worried for your safety as well, you know. You drink way more than I usually do, anyhow.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “Ah, you are right, Latte. I even told her before that drinking would’ve endangered her from passing out… A-And it did feel like she took it to heart.”

Kaidou: “It even happened to Bojack!”

Bojack: “Alright – you don’t have to bring it up.”

Kurumada: “I guess you’ve got a point there. There’s no way she would’a gotten herself so wasted to do somethin’ as reckless as slipping up on a flood of her own damn doing.”

Saiki: “ *That’s just asking to die* …”

Natsuki: “Then what about hitting her head on the sink? It did sound a bit ridiculous to me.”

L: “Of course – this is why I said it was *only* a possibility. The idea that she managed to hit her head with so much force from the sink alone was enough to kill her seems less manageable when we realise that her head wound was a lot deeper than that of one typically made from hitting your head on a blunt object.”

Jesse: “So was Retsuko’s head slammed into the sink after all?”

Hayasaka: “N-No, that can’t be it either… Remembering what the sink looked like again… Ah, it was smudged, wasn’t it?”

Yuri: “If I were to have my head slammed into a blunt object, it would leave a splatter-like stain of my blood behind…”

Saiki: “ *Did you have to describe it from the perspective of yourself* ?”

Brian: “Yeah, u-um, ignoring that, even if it was cleaned off a little by the water, surely it still would’ve held a resemblance to a, erm, ‘splatter’ of blood more than a mark…”

Ena: “But if Miss Retusko did not hit her head, where could the blood have manifested itself from?”

Hayasaka: “There’s a chance… i-it was done by hand.”

Mai: “Oh, that makes sense. From the smudged look, someone must’ve wiped it there themselves, hm?”

Kaidou: “But what does that mean? Why would someone wipe blood there?”

L: “I for one believe this alone opens up the possibility that potentially the entire scene was faked.”

Bojack: “ *Faked* ? What is this, some kind of bad joke? Because I know you’re a fan of those.”

L: “I certainly wouldn’t joke at a moment like this. No, there are a number of things that can be explained from the scene if we look at it from the perspective of a set-up.”

Kurumada: “What the hell does he mean by that, Hayasaka? He ain’t talkin’ nonsense, is he?”

Hayasaka: (“Why is he asking *me* ? Ah, w-well, if this *was* a set-up, then I do have a reason to question *that* …”)

CLOGGED BATHROOM TOILET

Hayasaka: “U-Um… Well, when we were investigating the flooded stall, Brian said that he thought the paper looked to have been forcefully shoved into the bowl.”

Natsuki: “You *looked* into the toilet bowl?!”

Brian: “J-Just for the investigation! I’ve seen worse, anyway!”

Saiki: “ *That’s not a good justification* …”

Hayasaka: “R-Regardless, it’s just… what if someone had done that to force the toilet to clog?”

Latte: “Oh dear – is that really true?”

Kaidou: “But what about the tap? Didn’t we say Retsuko did that?”

Mai: “Although, it’s possible for anyone to have turned on that tap. I’d say it was left to run to make us think she had tried to use it before she supposedly slipped.”

Jesse: “Hell, what if someone planted those bottles in the karaoke booth to make it look like she was shit-faced?”

Brian: “That’s definitely… *a way* of wording it…”

Bojack: “So – let me get this straight – you believe that everything, from the toilet to the sink or whatever, was a complete set-up by the killer to make us think Retsuko slipped and hit her head?”

L: “You concluded my thoughts just about.”

Bojack: “Okay. So what killed her?”

Ena: “Oh ho ho! That is easy peasy! You see, she–...Um, she… Oh great Runas! There’s nothing left! We’ve taken it all!”

Natsuki: “Wait what? What’re you saying?”

Saiki: “ *There’s no evidence left in the bathroom that proves how she died.* ”

Kurumada: “If everything in the bathroom – the scratches on the walls, the flood, whatever the hell else – was just bullshit, then where the hell does that get us now?”

Hayasaka: “T-That…” (“He’s right. There’s so many layers to this case: first, Yuri’s deception, and now this faked accident… It’s depleted us of all possible causes of death for Retsuko… A-Are we sure we’re on the right track here? Are we sure she even died in the bathroom at all? Haha… *W-Wait* .”)

Mai: “Hayasaka? Oh goodness, Kurumada, you scared him!”

Kurumada: “What?! No I didn’t!”

Hayasaka: “N-No, sorry, I just… I was just thinking if Retsuko was murdered in the bathroom at all.”

Bojack: “Are you–nope, not even going to question it. I’m just gonna drink instead.”

Kaidou: “Hey! You seriously can’t be drinking *again* at this time can you?!”

Jesse: “Jesus, how much can that flask hold?”

Bojack: “Enough to make me forget at least the first half of this trial.”

Saiki: “ *Can I be allowed to stand somewhere else* ?”

L: “...Carrying on, just because her body was discovered in the women’s bathroom, doesn’t necessarily mean Retsuko was killed there. Even the Nesos file only states the body’s location of discovery.”

Monotora: “If ya wanted more info, how about ya try gettin’ on yer knees and start lickin’ my paws? Kehe!”

Brian: “So we just have to prove that there was a possibility that she was attacked somewhere else, right?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, maybe there’s a chance we’re fine after all…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Yuri: “How could Retsuko die anywhere apart from the bathroom? I witnessed her lifeless body there last night after all.”

Natsuki: “I don’t wanna agree with Yuri, but I don’t think it’s possible she was killed outside the karaoke bar.”

Jesse: “She could’a been ambushed while singin’ karaoke.”

Ena: “Miss Retsuko was so involved in her loud melodies that she did not hear the killer’s approach!”

Brian: “But we didn’t see any signs of blood in that karaoke booth…”

Kurumada: “Was there blood anywhere else?”

Latte: “**I don’t think there was**. The karaoke bar was a little dark, so it was difficult to see anything, really.”

Kaidou: “Not even my night vision could pick up any signs!”

Hayasaka: (“I do think that Retsuko was killed in the karaoke bar… But, there’s a good chance I now know where…”)

BLOOD ON LOBBY CARPET

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “There was actually one place where we did discover blood outside of the women’s bathrooms, and that was in the lobby.”

Natsuki: “Oh yeah! We found that blood stain on the carpet. Weren’t you the one to identify it as blood, Yuri?”

Yuri: “Well, yes, but… Not even I know its purpose.”

Brian: “I remember how it was hard to see since its dried colour blended in so well with the carpet…”

Bojack: “Wait, so you’re telling me I could’ve stepped in *blood* ? Actually, I’m more concerned for Mr. Shoeless over there.”

L: “Stepping in a little blood won’t hinder me. Although, I had already noticed it myself. Considering its more appropriate splatter shape, I believe this is the true place the blow to Retsuko’s head was dealt.”

Mai: “I see, so it must've played out like this: Retsuko was first killed in the lobby, then taken to the bathroom where the killer set up the fake accident.”

Yuri: “Are you sure that’s what happened? You said in order to make it appear as if Retsuko was extremely drunk, the killer placed empty bottles of alcohol in the karaoke booth she was using. But in order to do that, they would have to take them from the stage bar, where Bojack was.”

Latte: “So how did the killer take the bottles without Bojack seeing them?”

Bojack: “Uh, about that… I was probably passed out when they did.”

Natsuki: “Seriously?”

Bojack: “What? The motive was a pain in the ass at that point.”

Kurumada: “Wait, I just realised somethin’. How the hell did Bojack not die when he passed out?”

Kaidou: “Maybe passing out doesn’t count because it was from the alcohol?”

Monotora: “Nope! If you make the decision to drink til’ you drop, then I’m sure as hell comin’ for your ass!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, then what if… What if Bojack passed out *after* Retsuko died?”

L: “According to how the motive rules were worded, we couldn’t sleep ‘until’ a murder occured. Once Retsuko had died, technically anyone was free to sleep without consequence.”

Monotora: “Well, don’t’cha have a keen ear? Kehehe! You were lucky this time around, alcoholic horse! If you had lost your consciousness any earlier, you could’ve expected a lil’ ol’ visit from me!”

Bojack: “...”

Jesse: “Hey, Bojack, just–just don’t worry about it too much, alright?”

Bojack: “...It’s fine. Let’s just move on.”

Brian: “S-So, from what we know now, everything in the bathroom had nothing to do with Retsuko’s real cause of death – and she actually died in the lobby.”

Saiki: “ *Died how exactly?* ”

Latte: “Saiki’s right. If the sink wasn’t it, then what was used to kill Retsuko?”

Ena: “Nor do we know how Retsuko was lured to the lobby from her booth!”

Kurumada: “Hell, how’d the killer even know she was doing karaoke in the first place?”

Natsuki: “Jeeze, way to pile on the questions.”

L: “As a matter of fact, I do believe I already know the murder weapon.”

Kaidou: “Already?! But we haven’t even discussed anything yet!”

L: “That’s because I figured it out during the investigation. It was a microphone.”

Mai: “A… microphone?”

Moony: “I think the detective’s broken. Can we get a new one?”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t believe L can state such outlandish theories without feeling any embarrassment, haha… Unfortunately, I understand where he’s coming from…”)

BROKEN MICROPHONE

Hayasaka: “L isn’t joking. During the investigation, he conducted an experiment on all the microphones in the lobby and found that one was unresponsive.”

Kurumada: “Wait, is that really why ya made me test all ‘em? ‘Cuz you thought one was the murder weapon?”

L: “As well as being one of the only blunt objects in the lobby, the act of striking Retsuko over the head with one would prove effective against her weaker physicality.”

Jesse: “That doesn’t mean the mics like, the definite murder weapon, though.”

L: “Then imagine it was: what would happen when blood from Retsuko’s head stained it?”

Natsuki: “Well they obviously couldn’t just leave it there.”

Brian: “But I don’t think the killer would’ve discarded it completely. Otherwise if we had counted up the microphones, it would’ve been suspicious to find one was missing.”

Yuri: “That only leaves the killer to be forced to clean it.”

Mai: “You don’t think they ran it under the tap, did they?”

L: “Indeed. It would be a reliable option as they set up the bathroom accident, however it would consequently break it in the process.”

Kurumada: “Huh. So that explains why it didn’t work in the first place. Damn things couldn’t handle a bit of water, despite being bluetooth or whatever.”

Monotora: “It wasn’t like we were expectin’ ya to dunk ‘em in water! Now someone’s gotta pay for the damages!”

Saiki: “ *Why do we have to? It’s your own fault for not disclosing they weren’t waterproof* .”

Latte: “But if all this is true, I have to ask why the killer chose to use a microphone to kill Retsuko.”

Jesse: “Yeah, wouldn’t it be easier to use somethin’ like, I dunno, a sledge hammer?”

Brian: “But, um, we don’t have access to a sledge hammer?”

Bojack: “I think what Todd 2’s trying to say is why the hell a microphone? It just feels… tacky.”

Kaidou: “Maybe the killer wanted to make it harder for us to find the weapon? If it came from somewhere else, there would be evidence of it being stolen like the knife.”

Kurumada: “It wasn’t that hard considerin’ Mr. Detective figured it out in a heartbeat.”

Hayasaka: (“Then….”) “Perhaps… It was the only thing they could use at the time.”

Mai: “Do you mean they were only confined to what was available in the lobby at the time? That seems a little impulsive.”

L: “But that was precisely the situation the culprit was in. If the murder was preplanned in advance, then they certainly would’ve utilised a more suitable alternative.”

Brian: “Actually, that’s probably why the killer set up the accident in the bathroom, right? Because if they killed her impulsively, they would need a way to cover up what happened.”

Natsuki: “Not to be rude or anything, but the idea of a drunken accident doesn’t feel very thought-through to me. It’s more like an afterthought if anything.”

Yuri: “Although, it was very clever in the moment. It had a lot of you fooled, didn’t it?”

Natsuki: “S-So what?”

Ena: “So if the killer had not planned to kill Retsuko in the upcoming days, why did they do it right then?”

L: “If the murder in the lobby was covered up with the ‘bathroom accident’, the most reasonable explanation is that it was something the killer never intended to do in the fist place.”

Jesse: “So you’re sayin’ the murder was literally an *accident* ?”

Latte: “Oh my…!”

Mai: “Although… I can almost see it as an attestment to guilt. The act of the accident was reflected in the accident created in the bathroom.”

Bojack: “And how did this accident happen exactly? It’s not easy to ‘accidentally’ kill someone, you know.”

Ena: “Perhaps it was an act of self-defence!”

Kurumada: “Retsuko wasn’t exactly the biggest threat, y’know.”

Kaidou: “But what about her claws?”

Brian: “I don’t think she was the one to attack first – she was preoccupied with karaoke at the time.”

L: “Then what if we were to flip this idea on its head: what if Retsuko had presented herself as a threat unintentionally?”

Latte: “Ah, what do you mean by that?”

L: “Think about it. We were all at least short of three days worth of sleep.”

Yuri: “At that time, hallucinations are a definite response.”

Hayasaka: (“Hallucinations, huh…? I felt as if I experienced a few of those myself, haha…”)

Natsuki: “Still, Retsuko looked pretty harmless – *a-and kinda cute* – so it doesn’t make sense for anyone to see her as dangerous even if they were tired.”

Jesse: “Unless she made herself look like a threat or somethin’.”

Bojack: “I doubt it was the alcohol – I didn’t feel intimidated by her.”

Saiki: “ *Why would you? You’re three times her size* .”

Mai: “Oh, maybe when she was singing, she put on an ugly face without knowing and it frightened the killer!”

Kurumada: “What kinda explanation is that?!”

Brian: “...What if… it was the type of music she was singing?”

Bojack: “Don’t tell me it was rock opera.”

Brian: “E-Erm, no? Hayasaka, you remember it, don’t you?”

Hayasaka: “Y-Yes… It was that song Ena accidentally triggered. Knowing Retsuko was using that karaoke booth, it must’ve been what she was singing last.”

Ena: “Oh, it was an unpleasant screech to my ears!”

Jesse: “Wait, what was it?”

Ena: “It went ‘thrawwww’ and then ‘whoaaaa’ and then it did a little ‘screeeew’!”

Jesse: “Yep. That’s totally death metal.”

Bojack: “How did you even understand that?”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m almost certain it was heavy metal from what I can recall myself, haha…”

Mai: “Oh, and heavy metal does sound dangerous, doesn’t it?”

Latte: “But I couldn’t see Retsuko singing heavy metal out of all genres…”

Natsuki: “I feel like she’d be more into the latest J-pop or something.”

Saiki: “ *Why’re you analysing her tastes* ?”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, it does make sense when you consider that Retsuko was the Ultimate Heavy Metal Vocalist.”

Kurumada: “Oh shit, that’s right. She hardly brought it up so I kinda just forgot about it. Heh, no wonder she was actin’ fishy the first time we investigated the karaoke bar.”

Bojack: “So, let me get this straight, Retsuko – little miss three-foot accountant – had been leaving to go sing *death metal* ? That… uh, well, I was not expecting that. She hid it well, I’ll give her that.”

L: “And with that courteously confirmed, if Retsuko was performing heavy metal – known for its vigorous screaming vocals – it was likely mistaken as a more threatening noise by the killer.”

Yuri: “And you claim the killer then proceeded to pick up a microphone and beat her to death?”

Brian: “M-Maybe more on the lines of ‘attacking said noise’ then just, uh, *that* …”

Kaidou: “Um, but how did the killer even find Retsuko in the first place?”

Jesse: “Yeah, I mean, we *just* figured out she was chillin’ at the karaoke bar all this time. And I don’t think anyone was plannin’ to visit her exactly…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but think back to Yuri’s account where she claimed to hear sounds coming from the karaoke bar despite being all the way in the library opposite. If the music could reach that far, it’s probable that anyone else around at the time would’ve heard it.”

Latte: “I think I would’ve investigated it too if I were there.”

Natsuki: “Wait, but wasn’t Bojack way closer to the karaoke bar? Why didn’t he hear anything?”

Bojack: “It probably just blended in with my usual thoughts. When you’re my age, you’ve been around enough parties to normalise the muffled sounds of blaring music.”

Ena: “How depressing!”

Mai: “So, just to conclude: the killer heard noises coming from the karaoke bar, went inside to investigate, and upon seeing Retsuko in her karaoke booth, mistook her for a threat and ran back into the lobby to retrieve a microphone.”

L: “Consequently, knowing she was struck in the lobby, she must’ve spotted the killer watching her, and innocently followed them out. After that, everything else fell into place: the faked accident in the bathroom, followed by Yuri’s coverup.”

Kurumada: “What d’ya mean by ‘coverup’?”

Hayasaka: “He’s most likely referring to Yuri’s addition to the case that was to make us believe she was the killer. That means, well, it’s most likely she’s not the true killer at all.”

Brian: “U-Um, I don’t think Yuri would’ve accidentally killed Retsuko and created the bathroom accident only to *then* start stabbing her…”

Saiki: “ *That just sounds ridiculous* .”

Bojack: “You don’t think she looks crazy enough to do that?”

Mai: “Well, we already did say the culprit’s murder was impulsive. With Yuri taking the knife a few days prior, she had been planning to kill in advance.”

Yuri: “...”

Natsuki: “Thank god… But, wait. How did Yuri even find Retsuko then? Not even she knew about the karaoke.”

L: “While that is true, knowing of her account, it’s likely to say she saw the culprit fleeing the karaoke bar after their murder.”

Kaidou: “So then she decided to check out what was inside and saw Retsuko…?”

Yuri: “Haha…”

Hayasaka: (“Was that a confirmation…? Or, are these still attempts to stay deceptive?”)

Jesse: “So, like, we done? We got all bases covered?”

Ena: “A toast is in favour of our endeavours here today!”

Monotora: “It ain’t time to pack it up yet, bozos! Ya still haven’t handed over the identity of the culprit!”

Ena: “Oh dear, the toast has been postponed…”

Latte: “But who could the killer be? Do we have any conditions like last time?”

L: “Apart from Mai and Latte’s alibi, there’s little else to work on. Considering we were all subjected to the motive, anyone could’ve hallucinated from a lack of sleep. Instead, we’ll have to rely on any mistakes the culprit could've made, such as a slip of the tongue."

…

Hayasaka: ("... *Ah* . N-No… That can't possibly be… *Oh god* . Someone *had* made a mistake in their wording… B-But it can't…")

Brian: "...H-Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: "..."

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: "... *K-Kaidou.* "

Kaidou: "H-Huh? Um, yeah? What is it, Mr. Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: "H-Ha, um, mind if I ask you a question? It's just… had you ever talked to Bojack during the investigation…?"

Kaidou: "Um… No, I don't think so. Why?"

Bojack: "That I can confirm. I don't think we've ever really talked before."

Hayasaka: "...Ah, y-you can lie if you want, it's okay…"

Kurumada: "Hayasaka? What the hell's going on?"

Mai: “What’s wrong with what they said, dear?”

Hayasaka: “...P-Previously, when we were discussing how it shouldn’t have been possible for Retsuko to have drunk so much the previous night to the point of passing out, Kaidou mentioned how Bojack had done just that.”

FLASHBACK

Latte: “Ah, it’s just… I find this a little off. Did Retsuko *really* go ahead and drink so much?”

Brian: “What do you mean?”

Latte: “Well, didn’t Retsuko say herself that she wished to stop drinking soon?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you are right, Latte. I even told her before that drinking would’ve endangered her from passing out… A-And it did feel like she took it to heart.”

Kaidou: “It even happened to Bojack!”

Bojack: “Alright – you don’t have to bring it up.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “However, he said that *before* Bojack revealed to the rest of the group that he passed out. So, if Kaidou never learned this from Bojack beforehand, then just… *how did he know* ?”

Saiki: “...!”

Hayasaka: “T-The only way he would’ve known, is if he was there to witness it for himself.”

Kaidou: “T-That…”

Natsuki: “W-What?! Seriously?”

Jesse: “We did say the killer stole a bunch’a empty bottles from the stage bar – they had to have seen Bojack at the time.”

Latte: “K-Kaidou… There has to be an explanation for this, right sweetie…?”

Kaidou: “Um, I-I… I-I just *assumed* that’s what happened! I know alcohol makes adults pass out, y-you know! It was only a guess! A-And I guess my guess was… right?”

Brian: “B-But, during the investigation, I remember you saying something weird, too…”

FLASHBACK

Kaidou: “So what were you two doing in the stage bar?”

Brian: “We were just trying to look for any clues related to Retsuko’s drinking with Bojack, really.”

Kaidou: “Hmph. Those two and their drinking… It’s so irresponsible for adults to drink – it always leads to them acting weird and passing out, and here it was no different.”

FLASHBACK END

Yuri: “‘And here it was no different’... It almost sounds as if you were certain one of them passed out.”

Kaidou: “N-Nn…”

L: “Not only that, but there was even that one moment on the morning of Walter’s body discovery…”

FLASHBACK

???: “GAHHH!!”

Latte: “Oh my! Who was that?”

The remainder of the people in the restaurant rushed out into the lobby where the scream had originally come from. Hayasaka paused as he witnessed an odd scene.

Kaidou: “D-D-Dark Reunion! Help! T-They’ve caught me at my worst moment!”

L: “...Do I look that freaky to you?”

Kaidou: “E-Eh? *L* ?! I-I’m sorry! I wasn’t looking very clearly – I’ve only just woken up! Please forgive me!”

FLASHBACK END

L: “Kaidou had mistaken me for a member of ‘Dark Reunion’ simply because he was *tired* .”

Kaidou: “A-Ah…”

Kurumada: “Hey, doesn’t that tie into the fact that the killer hallucinated Retsuko as a threat ‘cuz of a lack of sleep?”

Bojack: “Okay, that’s one too many coincidences. What the hell?”

Natsuki: “But does that mean… *Kaidou’s* the killer?”

Kaidou: “U-Um…”

Latte: “N-No… Surely not… Kaidou, please tell us you’re not.”

Kaidou: “I… I-I… *Oh* ! Um, there’s no way *I* can be the killer, haha. ‘Cuz, we know the killer had to be a woman as only they had access to the women’s bathrooms, you know.”

Ena: “That is very true! I suppose Kaidou cannot be the killer after all!”

Hayasaka: “N-No… That doesn’t apply anymore. That was only thought to be true when we thought Retsuko had been killed *in* the bathroom.”

L: “Since Retsuko was murdered in the lobby, anyone could’ve easily used her own tablet to gain access to the women’s bathroom.”

Mai: “To use such an easy to debunk claim… It only makes you look more suspicious, doesn’t it?”

Kaidou: “T-That… That wasn’t what I…”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “A-Ah, *Saiki* … P-Please, help me…”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “...Sai–”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. Just listen to yourselves* .”

Brian: “H-Huh?”

Saiki: “ *You’re all suspecting Kaidou, but is Kaidou even capable of murder* ?”

Latte: “Saiki’s exactly right! Kaidou wouldn’t hurt anyone!”

Jesse: “I don’t even think he *could* hurt anyone.”

L: “Regardless, it is insufficient to claim anyone cannot be a murderer from outward appearance alone.”

Bojack: “If you’re telling me Retsuko *and* miss crazy got violent in this case, then what’s stopping theatre kid?”

L: “Exactly, more or less. We cannot ignore this possibility in a life or death situation simply because Kaidou doesn’t look the part.”

Saiki: “*It’s not just Kaidou’s appearance. He’s truly physically weak. He’s horrible in gym, bad at most sports – if not all – and only acts tough when in reality he’ll break down at the slightest threat. It’s just impossible for Kaidou to even commit a murder*.”

Kaidou: “N-Nn… Y-Yeah…”

Hayasaka: (“And yet… Kaidou looks *hurt* from that comment.”) “Saiki… w-why’re you saying these things–”

Saiki: “ *Don’t argue with me* .”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “Saiki…?”

Saiki: “ *Because it's the truth. Just because Kaidou proved himself to be an idiot a few times, doesn’t prove anything.* ”

Hayasaka: “Then tell me… How was it not possible for him to kill Retsuko?”

Saiki: “ *If I have to explain it to you myself, then so be it* .”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Saiki: “ *If the murder weapon was the microphone, someone as weak as Kaidou would hardly be able to inflict any serious damage on anyone.* ”

Hayasaka: “That would be the case, if not for the fact that Retsuko would’ve received a more powerful hit regardless due to her smaller stature.”

Saiki: “ *Even if Kaidou had hit Retsuko with all his limited strength and caused some type of injury,* ***one blow wouldn’t be enough to kill her*** .”

RETSUKO’S HEAD WOUND

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “No… Retsuko wasn’t hit once, Saiki. Considering how deep her head wound was, it’s likely she was struck multiple times…”

Saiki: “...”

L: “That is very true. And it’s not only that: if Retsuko had the opportunity to fight back, then surely she wasn’t killed in one blow.”

Jesse: “I guess it didn’t matter how hard he hit her. As long as he kept doin’ it, she was gonna die eventually…”

Yuri: “Anything to off that hallucinatory threat, I suppose.”

Saiki: “*... It’s still impossible for Kaidou to be the killer.* ”

Bojack: *“Another* rebuttal? Jesus, kid, you’re relentless.”

Saiki: “ *There’s something you’ve all been overlooking this entire time. If Retsuko attacked the killer – as you just established – then they’d have scratch marks to show it* .”

Brian: “T-That is true…”

Saiki: “ *And yet, Kaidou doesn’t have any* .”

Kurumada: “How the hell do you know?”

Saiki: “ *Good grief – he’s not even wearing sleeves. Kaidou, push your blazer out the way and show your arms* .”

Kaidou: “S-Saiki…”

Saiki: “ ***Show them your arms, Kaidou*** .”

Kaidou: “A-Ah…”

Saiki: “ *See? Not a single scratch in sight* .”

Mai: “I’m standing right next to him, and not even I can spot anything that looks like a scratch mark…”

Saiki: “ *Exactly. Now, compare this to Yuri’s arms which are covered in literal proof. Do you really still think Kaidou’s the culprit now* ?”

Natsuki: “I guess that’s true…”

L: “...Saiki, you are fighting an ignorant, stubborn claim.”

Saiki: “ *Excuse me* …?”

Hayasaka: (“...I see it. The fault in his argument. What Saiki’s either hiding or neglecting to realise…”)

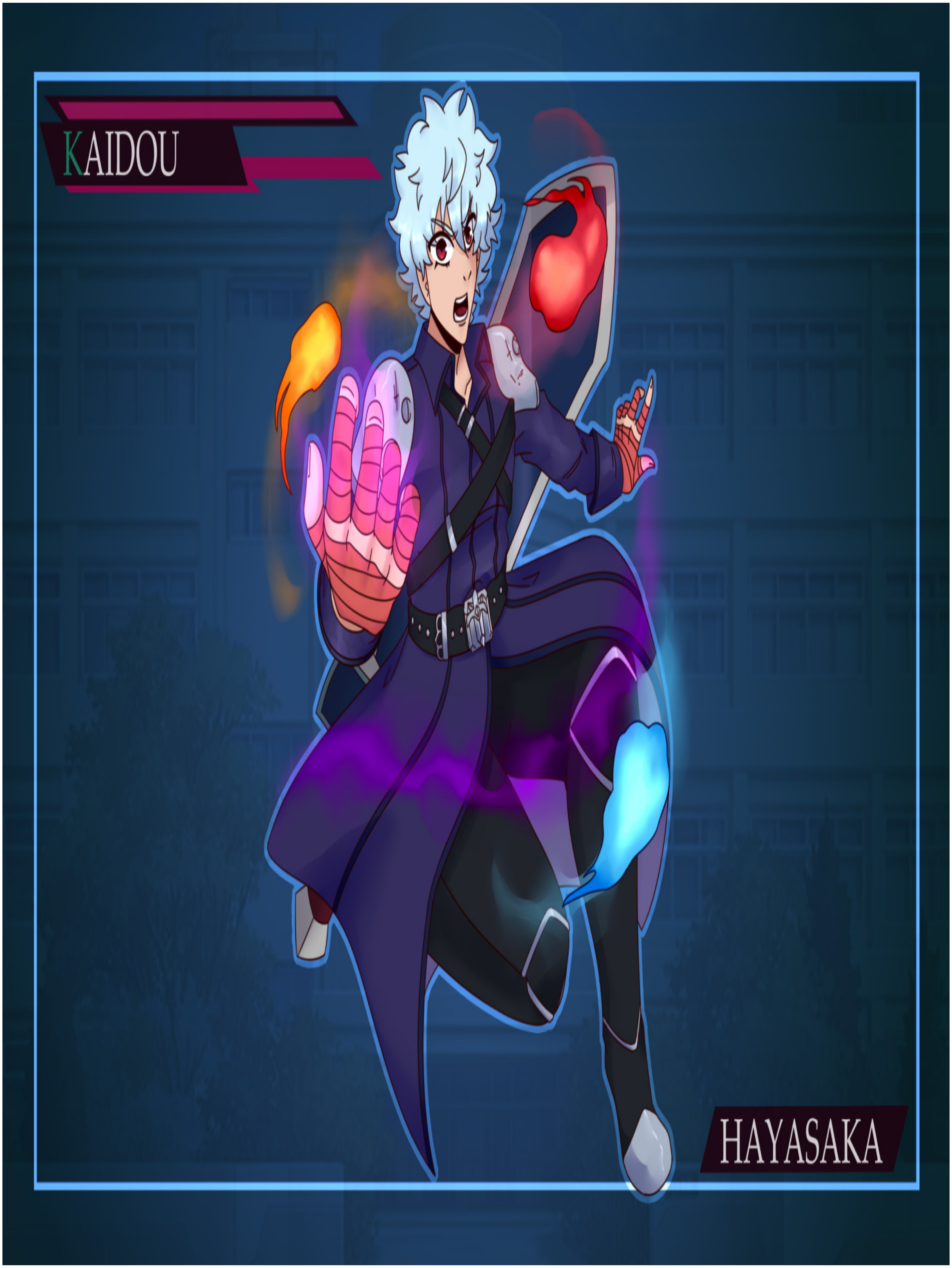
Kaidou: “...N-No, Saiki’s right! I’m not the killer, ‘cuz I don’t have any scratch marks!”

Hayasaka: “Kaidou… T-That can’t be true–”

Kaidou: “Why don’t you believe me, Mr. Hayasaka? W-Why’re you saying I’m the killer?!”

Hayasaka: “K-Kaidou…!” (“...O-Okay. I’ve done this once, I can do it again. As much as I hate to do this, if I stop now, it might endanger us all…!”)

ARGUMENT ARMAMENT


KAIDOU
HAYASAKA

Kaidou:

"I-I’m not the killer!”

“The Jet Black Wings swore an oath not to unleash my true powers unless for justice!”

“I can’t go against the hero’s code!”

ADVANCE

“T-This is… This is just a misunderstanding!”

“So what if I’m not very good at staying awake?”

“I would never do something as reckless as hallucinate!”

ADVANCE

“Mr. Hayasaka! Please! Believe me!”

“I didn’t kill Retsuko! I didn’t kill her!”

“T-There’s no proof I did it! Saiki said so!”

“I don’t have scratch marks! You’ve seen my arms! You’ve seen them, haven’t you?!”

“I would never kill someone so innocent as her! Never!”

“So please stop saying these things about me!”

FINAL BLOW

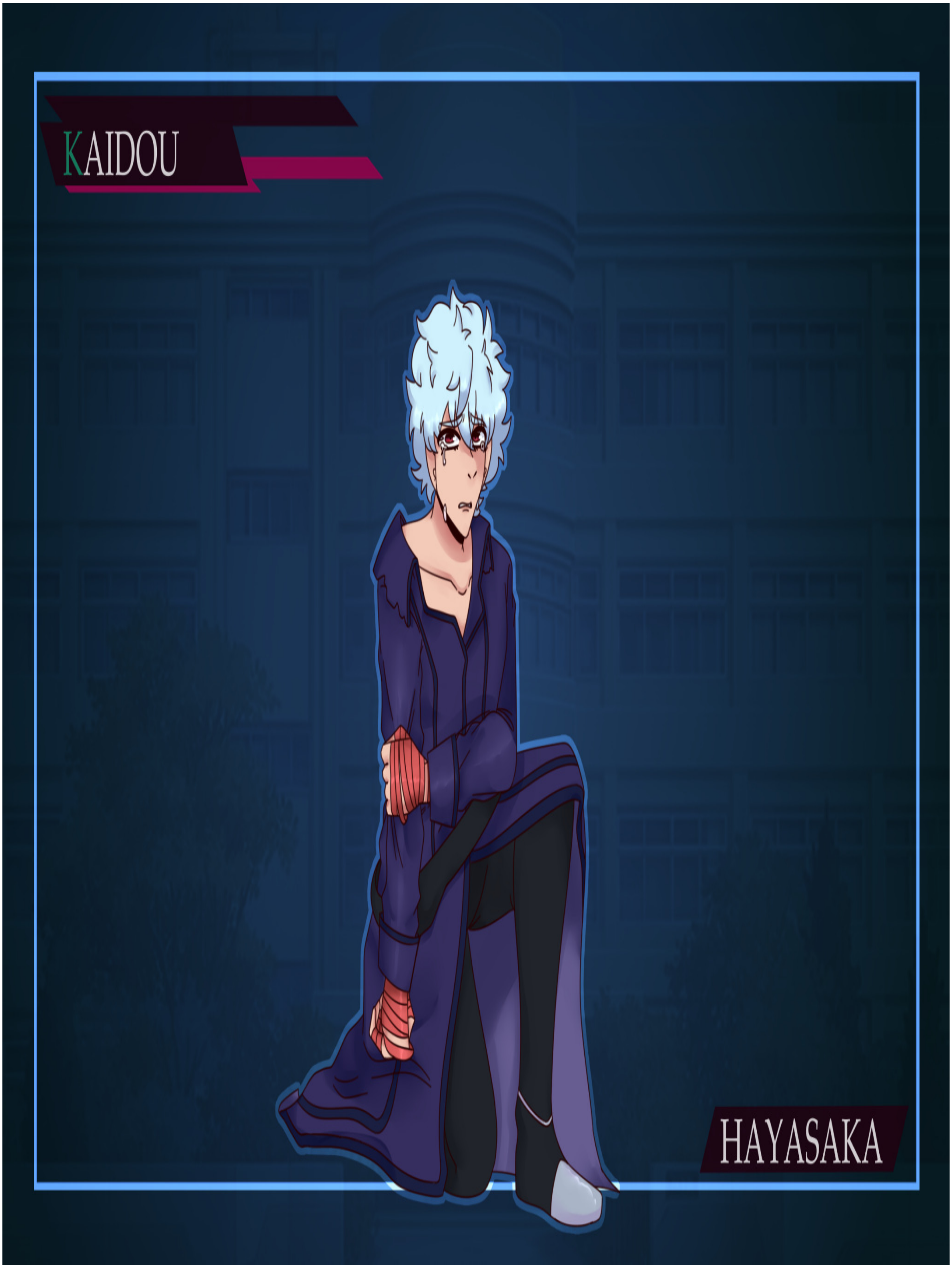
“I… I-I didn’t kill her. M-My arms… they’re clean, aren’t they…?”

BANDAGES

ON

KAIDOU’S

WRISTS


KAIDOU
HAYASAKA

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Your arms are not clean, Kaidou. T-The scratches – they’re hidden under your bandages, aren’t they…?”

Kaidou: “...W-Wha…?”

Hayasaka: “All this time… We had assumed Retsuko had managed to attack the culprit all the way up to their lower arms just from seeing Yuri’s arms alone… B-But, if you think about it, there’s no way she could’ve been able to reach that far up.”

L: “Indeed. It’s more possible to assume the scratches were inflicted around the wrists and arms – exactly where Kaidou’s bandages conveniently cover.”

Kaidou: “N-N… o…”

Brian: “So, if he took off his bandages, and nothing was there, he would be innocent…?”

L: “Likewise, if there is, and there is no viable explanation as to how they got there without backed-up evidence, then it’s to be assumed those are the scratch marks made by Retsuko when he killed her.”

Latte: “That… That can’t be true… Kaidou…?”

Kaidou: “...S-Saiki… P-Please…”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “W-Why aren’t you saying anything…?”

Yuri: “Because he’s run out of rebuttals. I can see where this is going, so let’s just get this over with…”

Jesse: “What the hell’s got you so apathetic now?”

Yuri: “Because there’s only two ways this can go. Either Kaidou takes off his bandages and shows everyone his ‘clean’ arms, or if he refuses to, it’s obvious he’s the killer.”

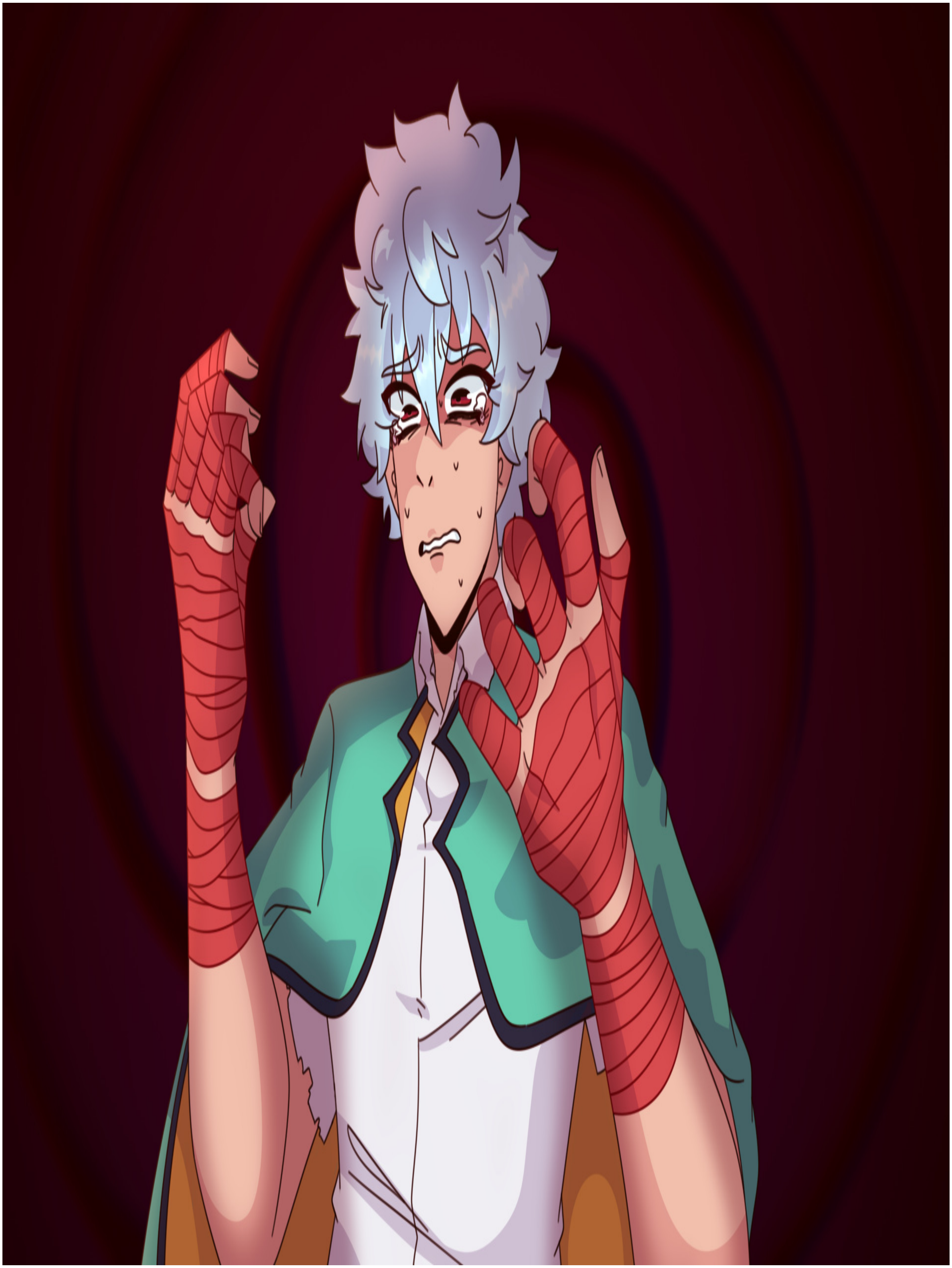
Ena: “You must take them off at once! Surely there is nothing stopping you if you are innocent!”

Kaidou: “...No–I-I can’t… *sniff* … I-I can’t take my bandages off… B-Because, if I do, m-my black beat power will escape…”

Bojack: “Your *what* ? C’mon, kid, stop being delusional. This trial’s already gone on for too long.”

Kurumada: “You’re just preventin’ the inevitable at this point…”

Kaidou: “I-I’m serious! It’ll endanger you all! I-If I do… If I take off my bandages… If I show you… w-what’s under them… what’s… under them…”



Kaidou: “Under… my bandages…? Ah… *Ahhh* …”

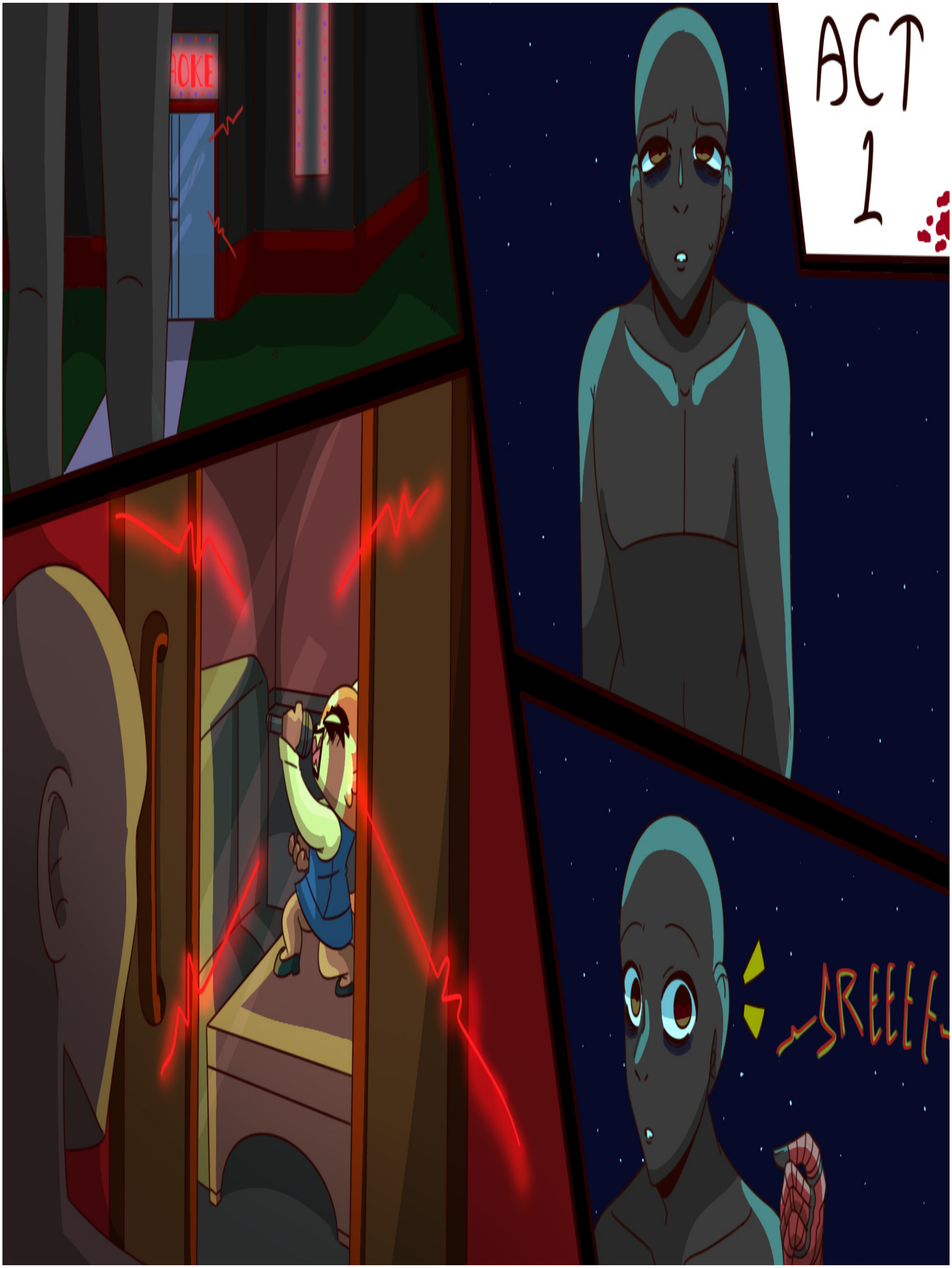
Latte: “D-Dear…”

Saiki: “...”

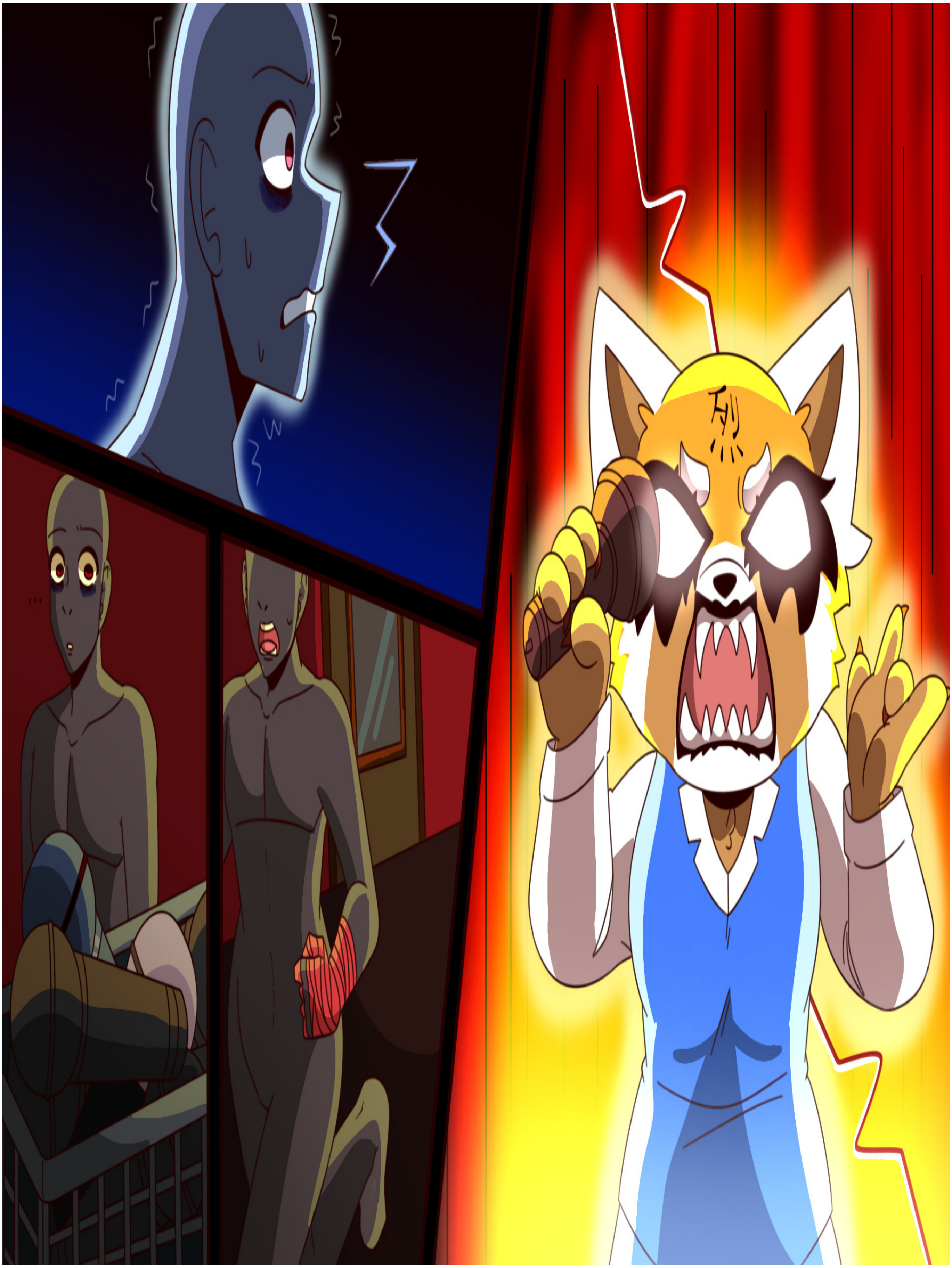
Hayasaka: (“Kaidou, n-no… You really are the…”)

L: “...I see. So, that’s how he wishes to be. In that case, I’ll take responsibility in summarising the case from start to finish. That way, we should all be confident in the identity of the culprit.”

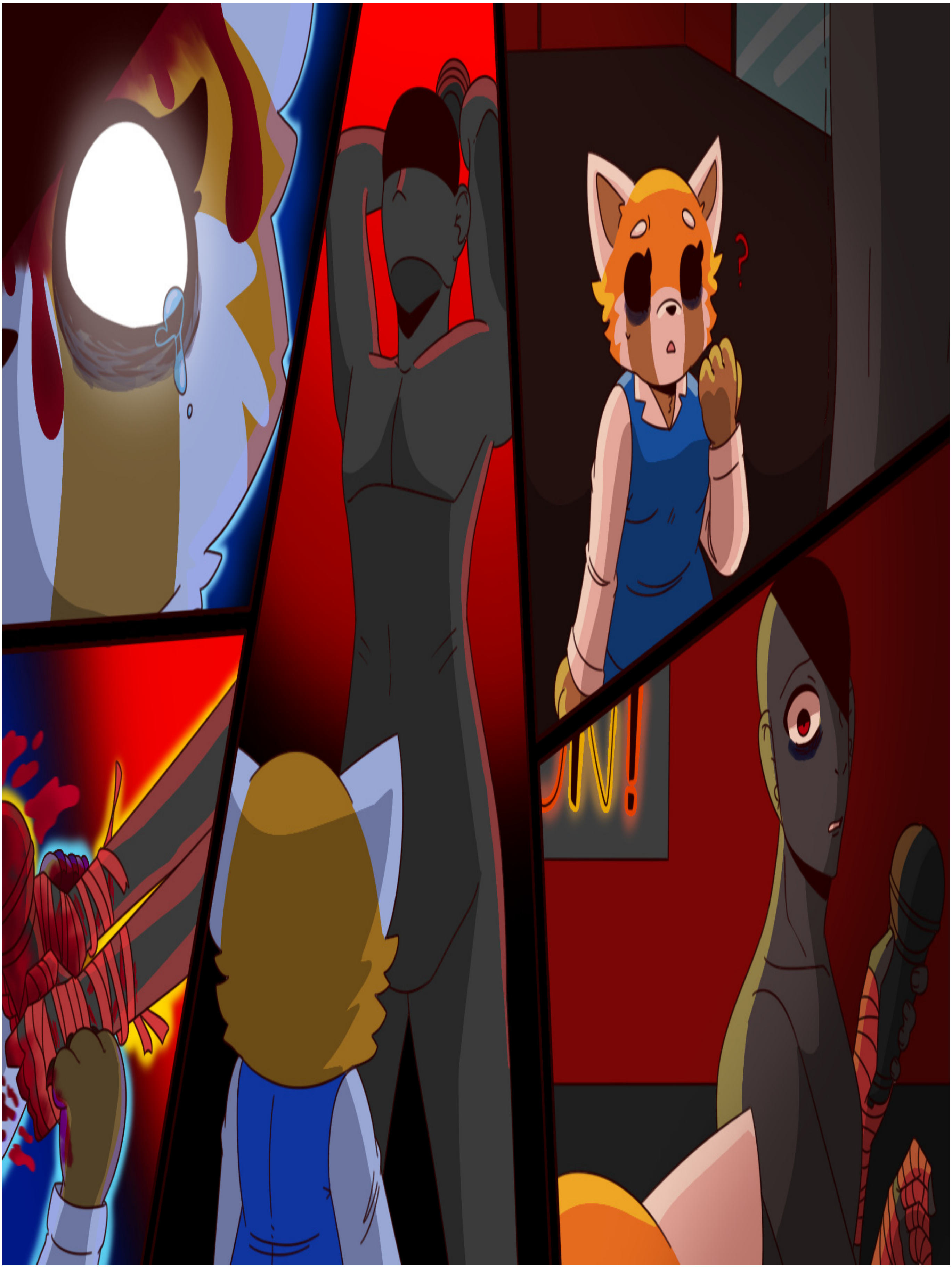
CLOSING ARGUMENT


OKE
ACT 1
SREEEF

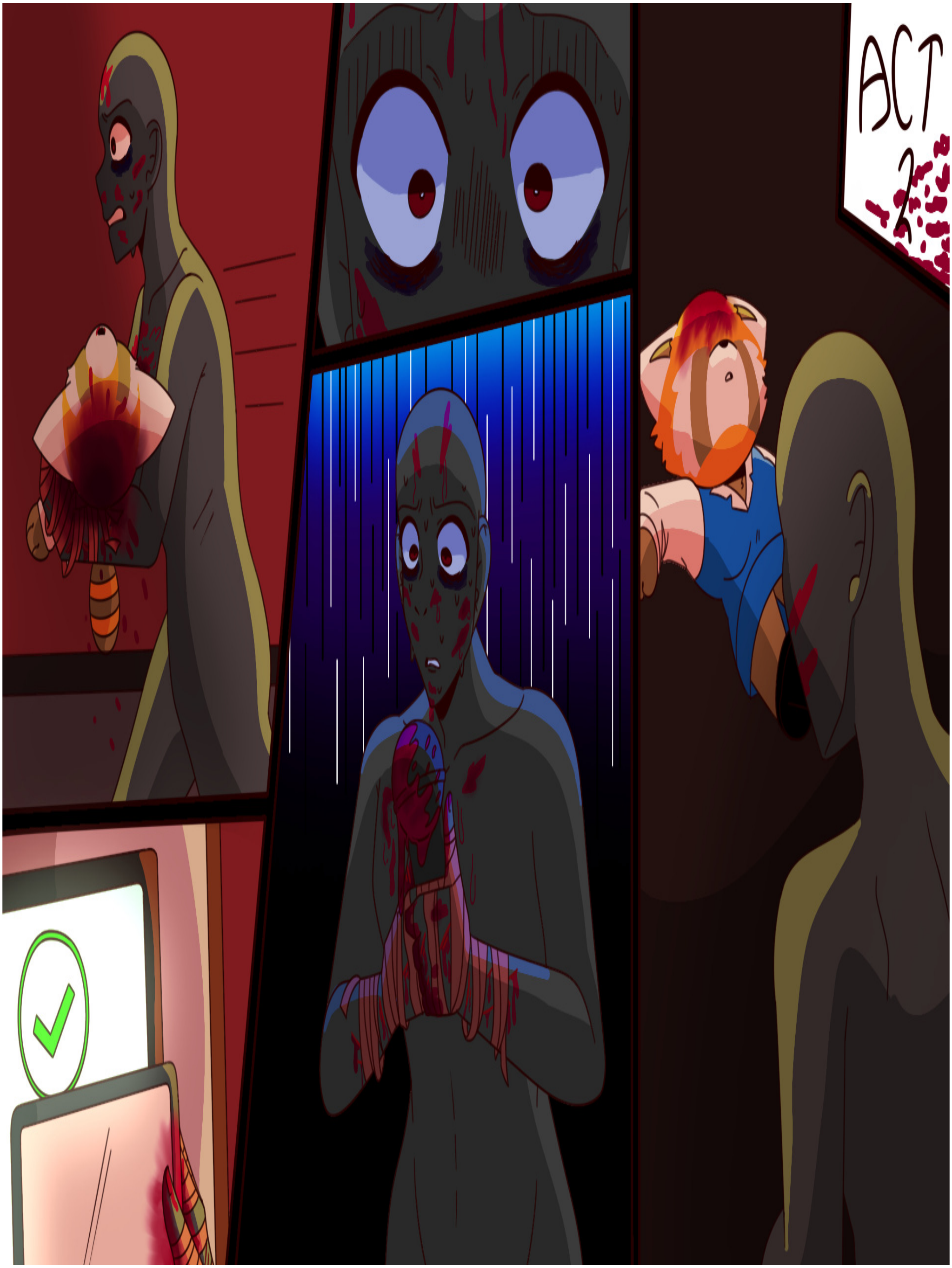
L: “This case has a few layers to it – but it’s best we start from the very beginning and unfold from there. During the late hours of last night, the culprit, for whatever reason, was walking around the second island. However, upon hearing noises emitting from the karaoke bar nearby, they decided to investigate. There, they witnessed Retsuko, our victim, performing karaoke in one of the booths. However, this wasn’t just any song – she was screaming death metal vocals, much akin to her Ultimate Talent. She had been doing this multiple nights ever since the karaoke bar opened, and tonight was no different.”


...
烈

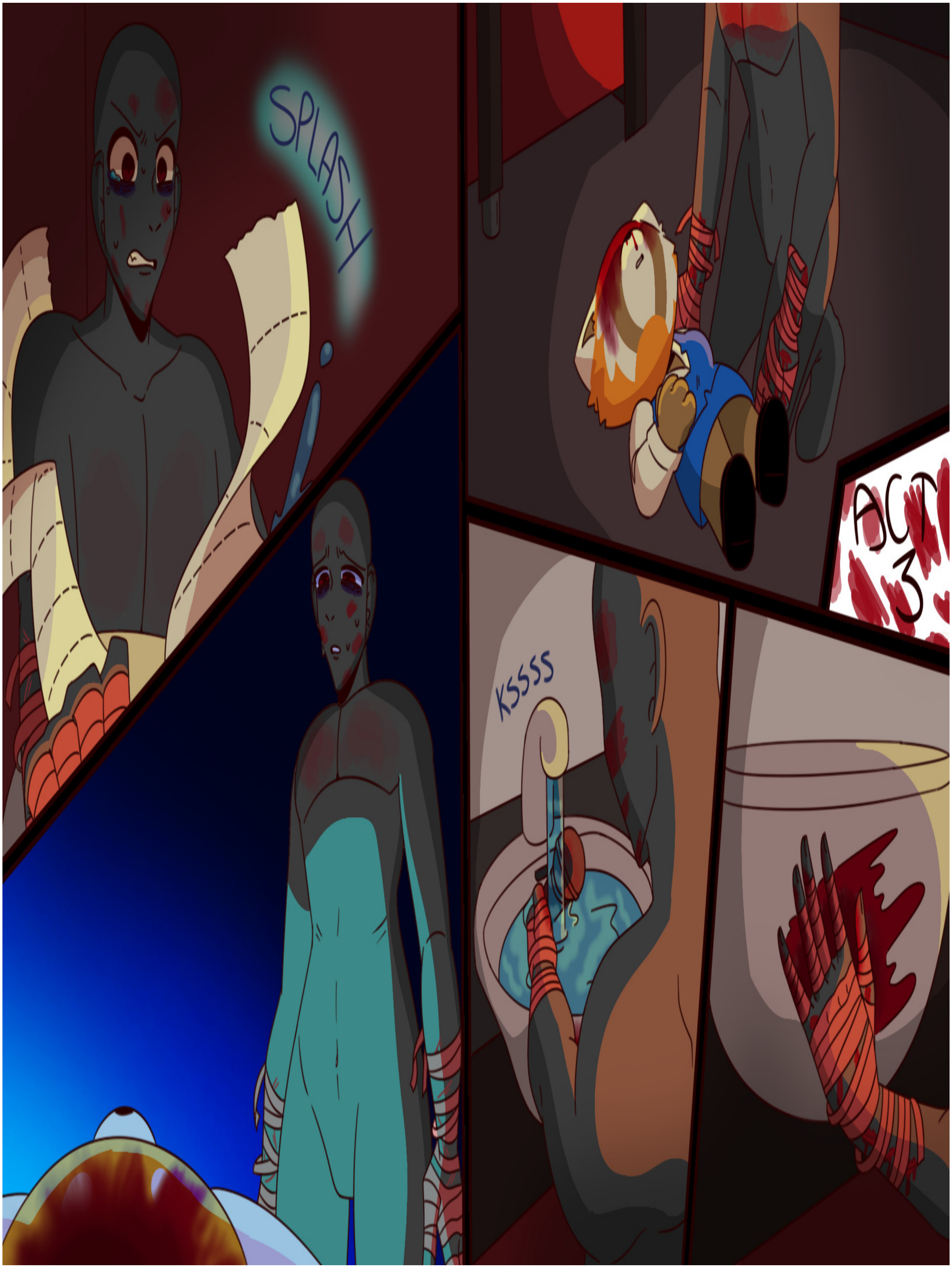
L: “The culprit, hallucinating upon a lack of sleep, most likely developed a warped perception of what they were seeing, aided upon the rough nature of the music. Believing Retsuko to be dangerous, they ran back out to the lobby to retrieve the nearest weapon they could find: a microphone.”


?
N!

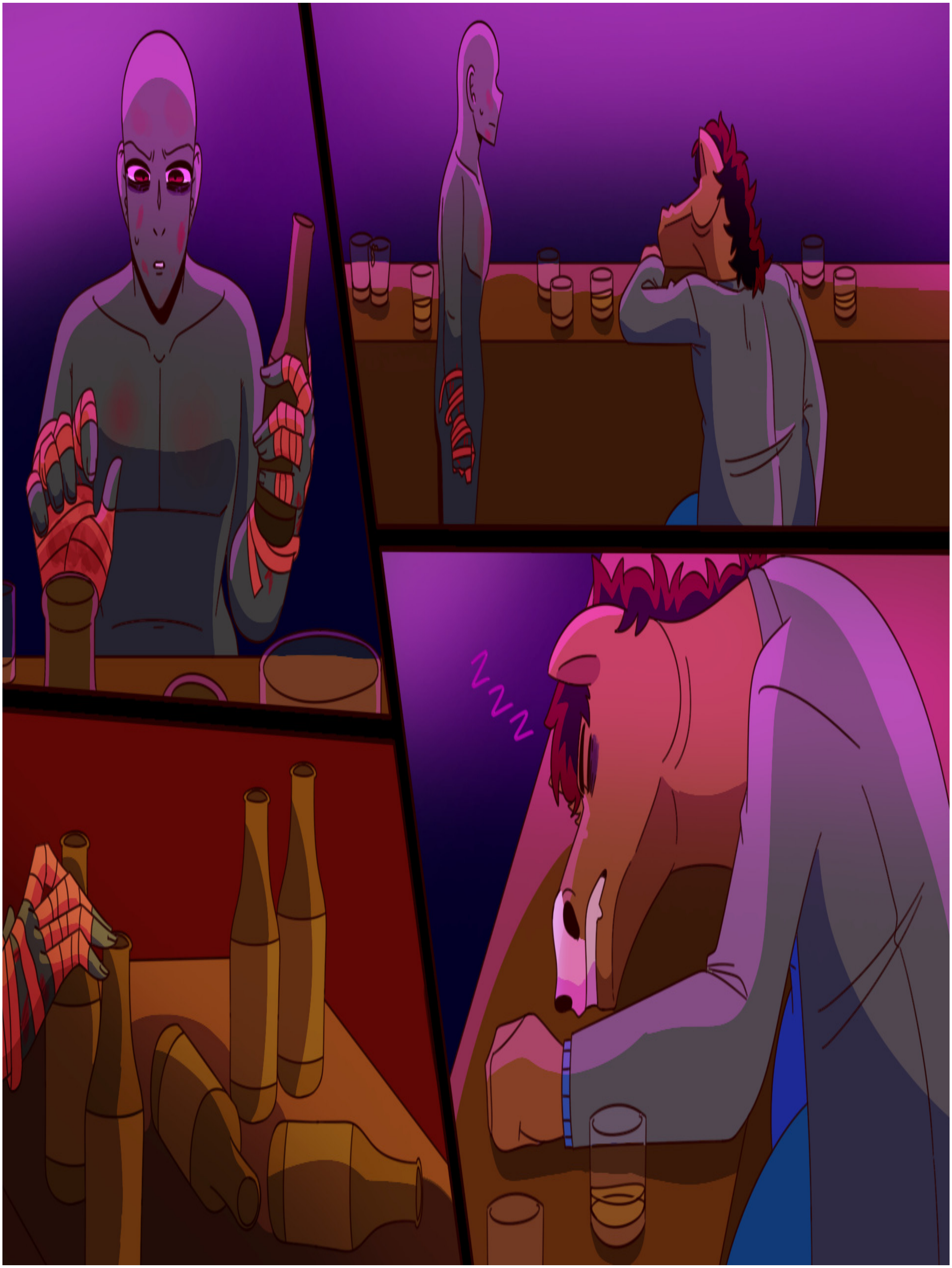
L: “Retsuko must’ve seen the culprit peering into her booth, and innocently followed them out to the lobby, likely to question what they were doing. However, before she could react, the culprit dealt the first blow onto her head. From a mixture of the culprit’s natural weakness and lack of proper force from the microphone, Retsuko did not immediately die. In a last-resort attempt to fend for her life, she began to attack back, scratching the culprit’s arms and wrists. Despite this, she was no match for the culprit, who managed to kill her in a few more blows, rendering her with a deep wound to her head.”


ACT
2

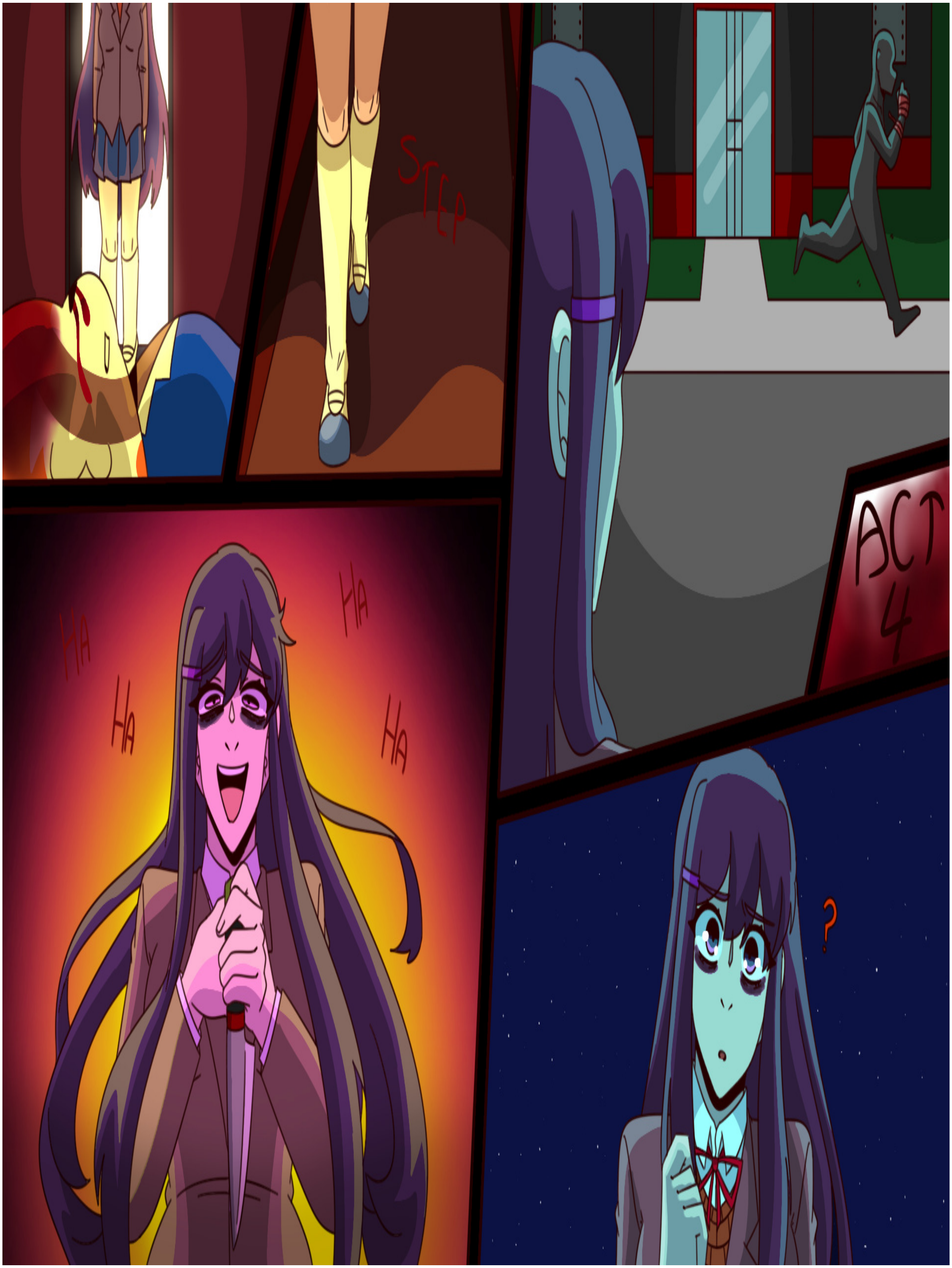
L: “After the adrenaline rush had died down, the culprit quickly realised that what they had just murdered was a fellow coworker on the island. In a panic, they rushed to clear up their crime. Quickly coming up with a cover-up, they carried Retsuko to the women’s bathroom, using her tablet to gain access inside.”


SPLASH
KSSSS
ACT 3

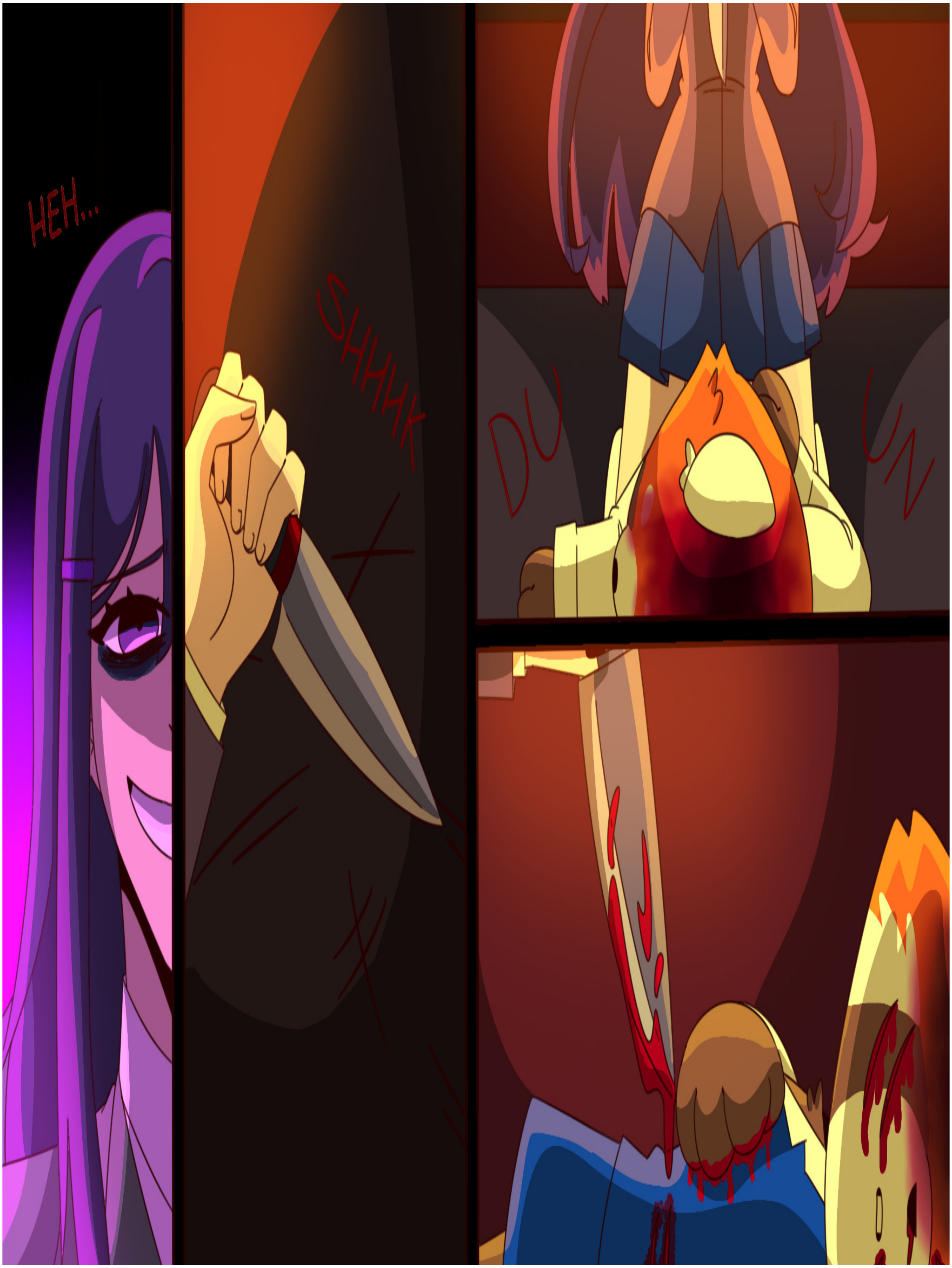
L: “Inside the bathroom, the culprit smeared her blood on one of the sinks, turned on the tap, and clogged a toilet stall to cause a flood. This was all to make it appear as if Retuko had clogged the toilet herself, slipped over and hit her head on the sink – making out her death to be a complete accident on her behalf. Before leaving, the culprit rinsed the bloody microphone under the tap to remove the blood, consequently breaking it.”


zzz

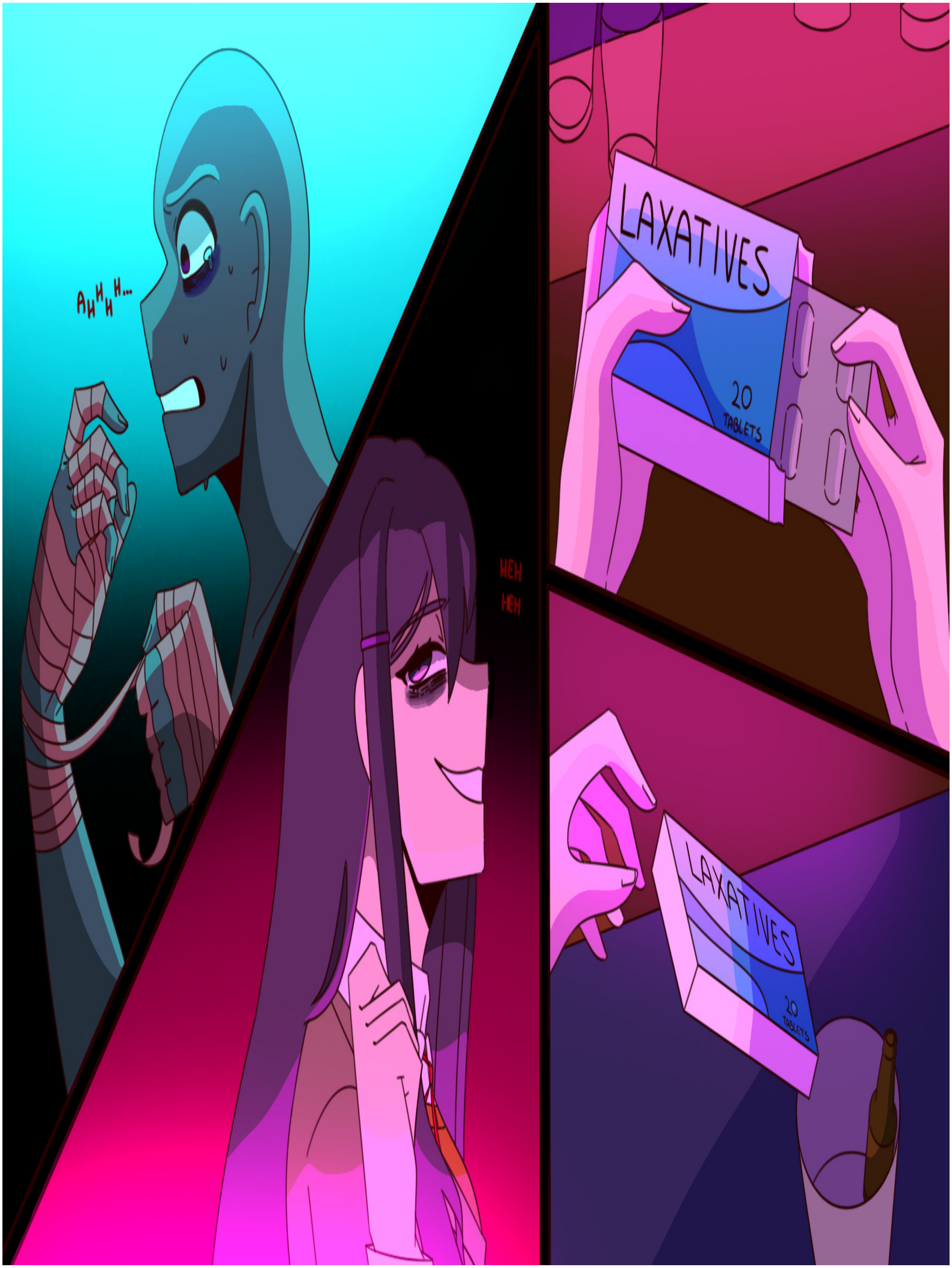
L: “In order to make their ‘bathroom accident’ story more believable, the culprit went to the stage bar next door to retrieve empty alcohol bottles. This proved easy to achieve, as Bojack, who had been previously drinking there, had passed out just some time after Retsuko died. The culprit then returned to the karaoke bar to place the bottles in the booth Retsuko was using previously. This pushed the idea that Retsuko had gotten herself so drunk that it would be likely she performed such a reckless feat in the bathroom.”


STEP
HA
Ha
Ha
Ha
ACT 4
?

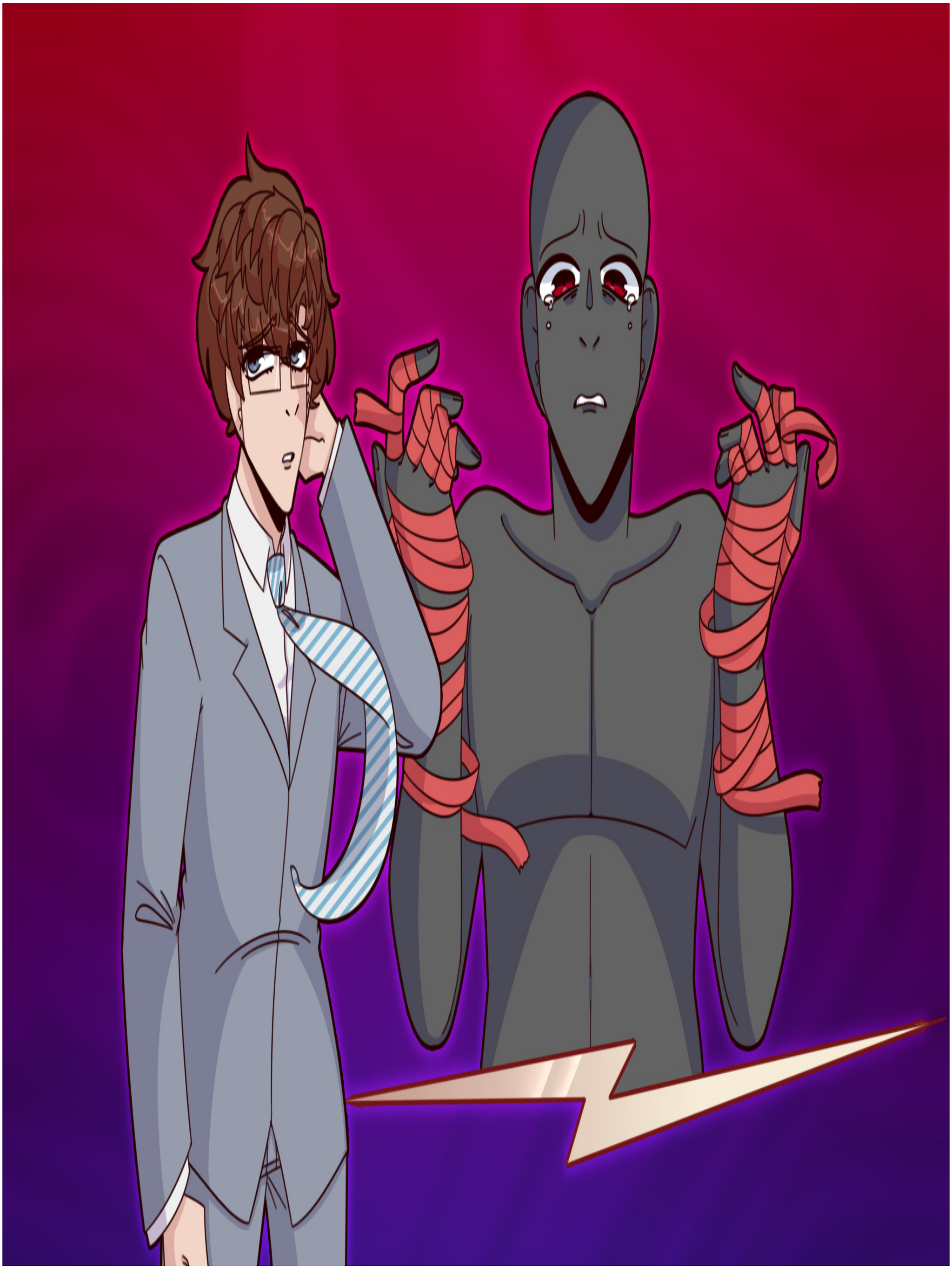
L: “After all this, the culprit fled the scene. They would be able to hide their scratch marks with fresh bandages, knowing no one would think twice about it. However, our case doesn’t end there. All this time, a certain someone else had witnessed the culprit fumble around the karaoke bar: Yuri. After the culprit left, she must’ve decided to investigate herself, finding Retsuko’s corpse in the bathroom. For whatever reason, Yuri saw this as an opportunity to twist the case to her own goals.”


HEH...
SHHHK
DU
UN

L: “With the knife she had stolen from the kitchen a few days prior, she inflicted cuts all over Retsuko’s body, as well as leaving a stab wound in her chest. She completed her scene by leaving cut marks on the bathroom walls to create the false narrative that the culprit actually had a struggle with Retsuko in the bathroom before stabbing her in the chest.”


AHHHH...
HEH HEH
LAXATIVES
20 TABLETS
LAXATIVES
20 TABLETS

L: “Yuri then made a trip to the pharmacy where she retrieved a box of laxatives. Removing the blister pack, she brought them over to the stage bar where she tossed the empty box into the trash can. This was to trick us into believing the reason Retsuko was at the karaoke bar in the first place was due to someone spiking her drink with laxatives, forcing her to travel to the nearest bathroom. The accumulation of these distractions would eventually push the trial into her favour of being the prime suspect – something the true culprit was unaware of.”



Hayasaka: ("The true culprit… The only person capable of such an accident was you, *Shun Kaidou* .")

COMPLETE

Kaidou: “N-Ngh… *sniff* …”

Hayasaka: (“So… that’s it then. There’s nothing more to say and yet… every part of me feels so horrible for aiding it. H-Haha… Why? Just why…?”)

Yuri: “Ah… I guess we’ve come to our true killer now.”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “... *sniff* , h-haha… *I-It was all just an accident* …”

Latte: “Kaidou, w-what’re you…?”

Monotora: “Oi oi oi! Is this *finally* time to start up the votin’? Is it finally time to pack up this damn case for good?”

Natsuki: “If… there’s nothing else to say, then…”

Bojack: “Let’s just get this over with.”

Monotora: “Kehehe! Now we’re gettin’ onto the real good stuff! Like before, you’ll find ya lil’ votin’ screen on your tablets – go ahead and tap on who ya think the blackened is! Will ya be right? Will ya be wrong? Let’s get it started…!!”

VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: END!

Monotora: “Hm… Ah, haha! Well, won’t ya look at that? The majority is in favour of Kaidou – good on ya! He was the true blackened who got the jump on Retsuko! Although I gotta say, this vote ain’t so unanimous like the last. Tsk tsk, Saiki: votin’ for Yuri only makes ya a coward for not facin’ the truth, kehehe!”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “...”

Kaidou remained silent, only sparing a glance of mild confusion in Saiki’s direction. His face held it’s usual blank state, yet a small crease was apparent in his eyebrows, Hayasaka only being able to catch it standing beside him. Just then, he heard a frustrated sigh, and shifted his attention over to the perpetrator.

Yuri: “...So then, my plan failed in the end, huh? You all voted for Kaidou… Well, I did too, only because I knew it would be pointless to keep going when I knew my narrative had been dismissed.”

Jesse: “Wait, wait, just–hang on. If you ain’t even the killer, then your ‘fake-stabbin’ shit had no reason to exist, like, at all.”

Kurumada: “Just why the hell did you mess with the case?”

Ena: “I remember her saying it was so she and Natsuki could escape the island together, but if she is not the killer… Ah! My brain is all muddled and confused!”

Yuri: “Haha… You see, that was just a cover-up in the hopes it would be disgusting enough to convince you all to vote for me.”

Natsuki: “What…? What does that even mean? Yuri, why the hell would you want to be incorrectly voted for?!”

Yuri: “Haa… I suppose I should explain myself.”

L: “I won’t deny I’m intrigued to hear it.”

Yuri: “...I think it started after the second island was opened. Ever since I was shaken from the previous murder, I turned to books to keep myself occupied. Day after day I spent time alone in the library, even more so when the ‘no-sleep’ motive was announced. Now, I love horror novels. Dystopias, death, despair… They’re so easy to immerse myself into. And it definitely didn’t stop me from comparing *this* situation to fiction. I mean, doesn’t this feel so absurd to you all? A death game… You’d think it was a joke if we weren’t experiencing it for ourselves right now. But then, as I kept pondering, I realised… *flaws* within this game.”

Hayasaka: “W-What flaws…?”

Yuri: “Think about it. Even if we’re all told we can just live on the island without having to kill someone, we’re all being forced to murder one way or another from the motives presented to us so far. The letters from a close one, no sleep… Basically, no matter how much hope you hold in yourself and the people around you, a murder will *definitely* occur.”

Latte: “T-That’s… a very pessimistic approach to our situation. You shouldn’t compare our reality to one possibility from fantasy.”

Yuri: “You’re wrong. It’s obvious Nesos aren’t going to let us live happily on the island. No, it’s just a lie, plain and simple. A lie to lead us into a false sense of security, one where we believe we have free control over our actions. Their goal is to make everyone suffer. Therefore, a cycle spouts: people die, the rest of us become more traumatised and depressed, repeating until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.”

Bojack: “You must be fun at parties.”

Brian: “But, I don’t understand… What did you intend to do?”

Yuri: “In order to prevent this from happening again, the only possible way was to end everything quickly. In other words, *killing everyone as soon as possible* .”

Hayasaka: ("W-What…?!")

Yuri: "Of course, I know it wasn't likely I'd be able to go around and kill everyone by myself. That's just wishful thinking at best. So instead, I realised I could utilise the rule of the executive trial: if we incorrectly identify the killer, then everyone will be executed."

Jesse: "Are you serious?! Your goal was to form a fucking suicide pact?"

Mai: "So is this why you decided to tamper with Retsuko's case?"

Yuri: "I guess some context is in order. Last night while I was leaving the library, I witnessed our culprit, Kaidou, dashing from the karaoke bar to the stage bar. At first I was confused. What was he doing? Why did he look so shaken? And so, I waited. He returned not long after with arms full of alcohol back into the karaoke bar, and a few minutes later he appeared again, but this time he ran in the other direction towards the bridge. Assuming he wasn't going to make another trip back, I decided to investigate."

Ena: "How did you locate Miss Retsuko's body?"

Yuri: "At first, I didn't quite know what I was looking for. The alcohol had thrown me for a loop, but I knew something suspicious had to be around. As I ventured further inside, the faint sound of running water caught my attention, and so I wandered towards the bathrooms. It should come as no surprise as to what I saw: Retsuko's body lying on the cold tiles, deep gnash in her head, water starting to spill over the sink and diluting the blood below… It was a sickly taste for the senses. And that's when something inside me changed. *Snapped* . What I had theorised before had been confirmed: the cycle *will* continue no matter who the person is, from the cool-headed Hiroshi to even the soft-hearted Kaidou."

Kaidou: "..."

Yuri: "...At that moment, an idea came to me. One where I'd be able to incriminate myself and get myself voted for – all to put my solution into action. If I had successfully managed to convince you all to vote for me, Kaidou would've been allowed to go free as the rest of us were killed, finally putting this game to its rightful end."

Kurumada: “And what made ya think we’d be alright with sacrificin’ ourselves for your screwed-up escapist fantasy?!”

Yuri: “It was either that or prolonged suffering, you know. If anything, I was allowing you the easy way out–”

Natsuki: “Shut up!! Just–just shut up! I don’t understand! I don’t understand anything you're saying at all! Yuri, how could you think like this? W-What about *me* ? Did I mean nothing to you? Was your ‘cover-up’ in the trial just using me and our friendship?!”

Yuri: “Ah, ah, n-no, no! Natsuki, that was never my intention from the start…! You’re different, Natsuki, you always have been to me. Despite my beliefs, I love you too much to let you die here. And that’s why I’m so grateful for the second motive…”

Mai: “What do you mean by that?”

Yuri: “If I was successful in having Kaidou win the trial, not only would we all be executed, but he’d be allowed to keep one person alive. Of course, I planned to have him choose Natsuki as that person. That way, she’d be allowed to live.”

L: “I find that all very hard to believe. Surely, Kaidou would have chosen Saiki as his plus one.”

Yuri: “Haha… you never did figure out what happened to that missing knife, huh?”

Brian: “W-Wait… You don’t mean…?”

Yuri: “It goes without saying, but I’ve kept it on me this entire time! I was surprised I wasn’t sanctioned for bringing a weapon into the trial grounds, but I suppose as it was never mentioned in the rules, it was a bit of a grey area. Regardless, by threatening Kaidou, he would’ve had to choose Natsuki.”

Kaidou: “W-Wha…?!”

Latte: “You wouldn’t…!”

Bojack: “What the hell is wrong with you?”

Monotora: “Kehehe! She’s a damn dangerous one! I’m so exhilarated by it!”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “...Hang on, there’s one more thing still buggin’ me about all this. You lied about Retsuko attacking you – whatever – but if she didn’t, then what’s up with what you showed us earlier?”

Yuri directed her gaze to the floor, huddling into herself with an almost sheepish smile.

Yuri: “Ah, that… Haha, t-that’s just a habit of mine…”

Ena: “H-Huh?!”

Hayasaka: (“...S-She didn’t just imply that… Oh my *god* . T-That’s…”)

Yuri: “...I had to do everything within my power to try and convince you all. But in the end, it wasn’t enough. You saw through my lies and eventually came to the right person. Mm, I guess I’ll have to wait a little longer to save everyone…”

Despite trailing off into silence, no one dared to speak up. Yuri’s words had stunned most into silence, others into utter disorientation. Shimmers from the surrounding glass bounced off her darkened face, painting her complexion into something almost inhuman.

Hayasaka: ("...I can't even imagine how she came up with such a sickening ideal. Does she really believe killing us all is the answer? Is what she said the true goal of this death game? It's downright insane, and yet… I feel sorry for her somehow. It's obvious her mental state has caved under the pressure, but still, what she's attempted to do is so cruel… She must realise that. Or perhaps, she truly doesn't care about the morality of her actions…")

Monotora: "Oi bastards – what's with all this attention spent on the faker, eh? If I was ya, I would be choking baby blue for answers in the little time ya can!"

Kaidou: "A-Ah…!"

Kaidou tensed up at Monotora's words as everyone's eyes landed back on him. The lack of any want to start the conversation made it clear no one wanted to accept he was the blackened, not even Kaidou himself.

Latte: "Kaidou, sweetheart… How did this happen…?"

Kaidou: "M-Miss Latte…"

Kurumada: "Ya were pretty eager to lead us back onto findin' a way to escape after Walter died… Hell, you even said yourself that there'll never be a murder again."

Kaidou: "...I never intended for this to–to happen. I… I hardly remember what happened at all."

Hayasaka: "W-What do you mean…?"

Kaidou: "Last night – w-when the second motive was announced – I saw how tired everyone had become. I was scared we were all gonna succumb to sleep. But I didn't want that to happen–I-I felt ashamed I couldn't bring us together with a plan in time to save us. Even when I was told to give up by Saiki, I just couldn't. I felt too guilty to let this responsibility slip off my shoulders when I picked up this burden myself…"

Latte: "Kaidou, you never needed to in the first place! No one was expecting it of you…"

Kaidou: “B-But I wanted to prove to everyone my worth despite what you all believed of me.”

Ena: “In what way do we believe of you…?”

Kaidou: “I know none of you joined my distraction team because you wanted to help me. You only did because you pitied me… A-And I didn’t feel like much help in Walter’s trial, even when I was trying to aid L. I just looked like an idiot…”

L: “I don’t believe anyone ever called you an idiot.”

Kaidou: “But I still know that’s what you all thought of me! I just wanted to be helpful! I-I just wanted to be someone people could look up to! Someone as commendable as Miss Latte, or as smart as L, or as strong as Kurumada…!”

Mai: “Kaidou…”

Kaidou: “...A-Anyway, I decided to look around the islands instead of going back to my hotel room. I didn’t really have a goal in mind, I just hoped I could find *something* to help save everyone. Heh, even running into Monotora would’ve given me at least some kind of situation. But it didn’t come to that, because when I got to the second island, I heard strange noises coming from the karaoke bar. I couldn’t just ignore it, so I went to investigate what it was. When I found it was coming from inside a karaoke booth, I peered through the window. Inside, I thought I saw a *monster* screaming out their lungs – I-I thought it was some kind of war cry. *It didn’t look like Retsuko at all* .”

Bojack: “...”

Kaidou: “Right then, a new instinct kicked in – one I had never experienced before in my life. I had to attack it. I *had* to attack the threat. I had to save everyone. I rushed around, looking for something I could use. I noticed the microphones in the lobby, and picked one up without thinking. Just then, I saw Retsuko approach behind me. S-She probably tried to ask what I was doing there… But I didn’t see her. I just saw a monster. And in that moment, with my mind *screaming* at me, I raised the microphone.”

Natsuki: “N-No…”

Kaidou: “...I don’t remember what happened after that. The only thing I can recall was staring down at Retsuko’s lifeless body with my wrists stinging in pain and covered in blood.”

L: “What happened after you realised you had killed her?”

Kaidou: “W-When I came to my senses, I realised I had to cover up what happened. I was scared of taking Retsuko anywhere outside the karaoke bar in case I got caught, so I looked around for somewhere else to hide her. I noticed the bathrooms out of the corner of my eye, and I came up with the idea to set up the bathroom accident.”

Yuri: “...Ah, so how come there was no blood when you carried her to the bathroom?”

Kaidou: “T-That… Since my bandages were already ruined, I took them off and wrapped them around her head to stop the bleeding. Afterwards, I spent the rest of the night dealing with my scratch marks in my hotel room, but my mind couldn’t stop replaying the memory of what happened over and over again…”

Hayasaka: (“How can I even respond to this…? It’s just… *horrible* …”)

Kaidou: “ *sniff* , I-I never wanted to kill Retsuko…! It was all an accident! If I wasn’t so tired, I’d never make that mistake!”

Latte: “Kaidou…!”

Bojack: “Kid…”

Monotora: “Oi! Is ya lil’ sob-story over yet?! I’m gettin’ bored to tears over here!”

Kaidou: “H-Huh…?”

Monotora: “You’re like a broken record. No matter how hard you try to convince yourself that it was all just a ‘wittle accident’ , you’re a cold blooded killer. And nothin’s gonna change that. You lost, and now you’re gonna face the punishment of death for it, kehehe!”

Kaidou: “ *A-Ah…* ”

Saiki: “...!”

Kaidou: “N-N-No… N-No, I—I-I don’t wanna die… *I don’t wanna die* !!”

Frantically kicking off the ground, Kaidou began to run towards Saiki. He leaped onto him before the other could react, wrapping his arms around him tightly as he buried his head into his chest. His grip was iron, constricting, nails digging into Saiki’s back like he was holding on for dear life. Loud sobs erupted from the boy accompanied by incoherent protests muffled by Saiki’s shirt. And yet, Saiki remained still as always. Hayasaka almost thought Kaidou was hugging a brick wall at the sheer lack of movement from the taller boy. Sucking in a shaky breath, Kaidou picked his head up to look at him.

Kaidou: “S-Saiki… I’m sorry for everything I’ve done! I-I know you’ll never forgive me! I know our friends will never forgive me either! I don’t even know why I bothered covering up the crime – ‘cuz that would’ve only meant killing everyone else if they got it wrong! B-But… when you started to defend me, I guess a small part of me thought I’d be able to leave here with you, and we could forget about this whole nightmare…”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “...I-I miss our friends so much, Saiki. I just wanted to see them all again: Kuboyasu, Nendou, Teruhashi, Yumehara – and everyone else!”

Sniffling, Kaidou tried a lost, broken smile.

Kaidou: “H-Haha… I’m no better than Dark Reunion for my unforgivable sin.”

Saiki: “ *Kaidou* …”

Kaidou: “...N-No, maybe it’s okay that I die. Even when Hiroshi admitted he was afraid to die, he still died with dignity.”

Latte: “K-Kaidou… No…!”

Monotora: “What the hell is this shtick?! Ya really think cryin’ into ya robot of a boyfriend’s chest is gonna do anything but piss me off? Ahaha, screw it, it’s about time we get onto the execution!”

Kaidou began to lose his grip on Saiki, and slipped off him. Despite leaving Saiki’s blazer crinkled, the other dared not to move a muscle still.

Saiki: “*... You can’t die...* ”

Kaidou: “Haha… Knowing I’m going to die, it makes me feel strange. My body is trembling. But, even if I’m weak, and even if I’m afraid, I’m going to try my hardest to be the Jet Black Wings to the end.”

Holding onto his forced smile, Kaidou gave Saiki a soft look.

Kaidou: “Saiki… Even if you’ve never been all that verbal, I’ve always appreciated you as one of my best friends. I just hope you’ll stay the same even after I’m gone. I’ve always liked you like this.”

Monotora: “So then, we’ve prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Academic Prodigy, Kaidou!”

Saiki: “... *K-Kaidou* …!”

Monotora: “Time to play with my prey! IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!!”

Kaidou: “ *I love you, Saiki* .”

PUNISHMENT TIME! [VIDEO]

Monotora: “Gahahaha! What a real tragedy that was! Looks like Kaidou reverted to his shitty fantasies even up to his death! Really gave me a fun time, though!”

Ena: “Noooo! I cannot take this! He did not deserve such torture! Let this end, I beg of you!”

L: “...”

Hayasaka: (“ *Ah*... N-No, Kaidou… He’s gone. *He’s dead* . He’s…”)

Curling his arms around his chest, Hayasaka gripped onto himself tightly. A nauseating bile packed at the back of his throat, but he forced himself to choke it back down. As ridiculous as it sounded, he felt as if he didn’t deserve to vomit. The final moments of the punishment replayed in his head like a disorientated film, but he focused his attention towards Saiki, who was staring at nothing with wide, numb eyes. The once jaded boy had been shaken to his core, and Hayasaka couldn’t help but watch in total anguish over it.

Bojack: “You *sick* assholes. That was fucked, you hear me? The kid didn’t deserve that for his mistake. Hell, not even Retsuko would’ve wanted him out like that.”

Monotora: “Happy to hear the positive reviews - kehehe!”

Jesse: “Go choke, jackass.”

Yuri: “...That was very unfortunate for us, you know. If you would’ve all just voted for me, none of us would’ve had to have gone through that. We could’ve ended this a lot easier–”

Natsuki: “SHUT UP!”

Yuri: “A-Ah…! N-Natsuki, what is–”

Natsuki: “No! Just–just stop talking, alright?! I don’t want to hear another word from you.”

Restraining her tears, Natsuki glared at Yuri, her eyes rife with frustration and betrayal.

Natsuki: “You–You shouldn’t be saying such screwed up things when someone’s just *died* ! Do you not even care what happened to Kaidou just now?! I-I’d rather you just *not* speak until I can come to terms with… with whatever the hell is going on anymore!”

Yuri: “...”

Monotora: “Yeesh! Young love never lasts long, does it? It’s always one thing or another with people like you! Well, I’ve had my fun, and it’s about time I let you continue this alone before the sounds of ugly sobbing are ingrained into my ears! Until we meet again, my bastardous prey!”

Monotora spared no passing glance as they sprung out of the trial grounds.

Kurumada: "... *Fuck* – and he had looked up to me, saw me as a damn role model and just–shit! This ain't fair on him!"

Hayasaka: "K-Kurumada…"

Latte: "This… T-This can't be happening…! No, no! He can't be gone! Kaidou…!"

Latte weeped into her cupped hands, voice muffled by her silk gloves. Gently, Mai moved over to her and guided her head onto her shoulder.

Mai: "Shh, Latte, dear, just breathe… Oh, this is just… inhumane…!"

Turning away from the pained looks of the grieving around him, Hayasaka caught notice of Brian who appeared distant. Quietly stepping over to him, Hayasaka could see his expression more clearer: although not quite caught up in sorrow, the frown etched on his face spoke clearly of his regret. Hearing the soft approach of loafers, Brian turned his head towards him. Hayasaka mustered a soft look, causing him to let out a shaky sigh.

Brian: "I… I'm sorry…"

Hayasaka: "For what…?"

Brian: "I feel terrible on the inside. If I never brought up the fact about the blood clot on Retsuko, then we would've never figured out the killer was Kaidou in the end."

Hayasaka: "It's not your fault, Brian. We most likely would've figured it out anyhow. People like Natsuki and L – they would've never accepted an easy vote for Yuri like that, haha…"

Hayasaka almost flinched at letting a nervous chuckle slip out. Brian paid no mind, nodding his head at his assurance. After a moment, he looked over at Saiki.

Brian: “...Saiki was close friends with Kaidou, wasn’t he? To be forced to watch him die like that… D-Do you think he’ll be okay?”

Hayasaka didn’t respond. Not because he didn’t want to, but because he didn’t know how. Brian’s question was merely to fill the silence; it could answer itself. Following his gaze to the boy once again, he was hardly surprised to discover he hadn’t moved since. He heard Latte clear her throat as she wiped her tears.

Latte: “Saiki… Would you like a hug, dear?”

Saiki didn’t reply. He continued to stare hard into the floor, like a broken doll with no purpose to fulfil. There was nothing to be inferred from his eyes. Blank, heavy, *gone* .

Things had definitely changed in the group that day.

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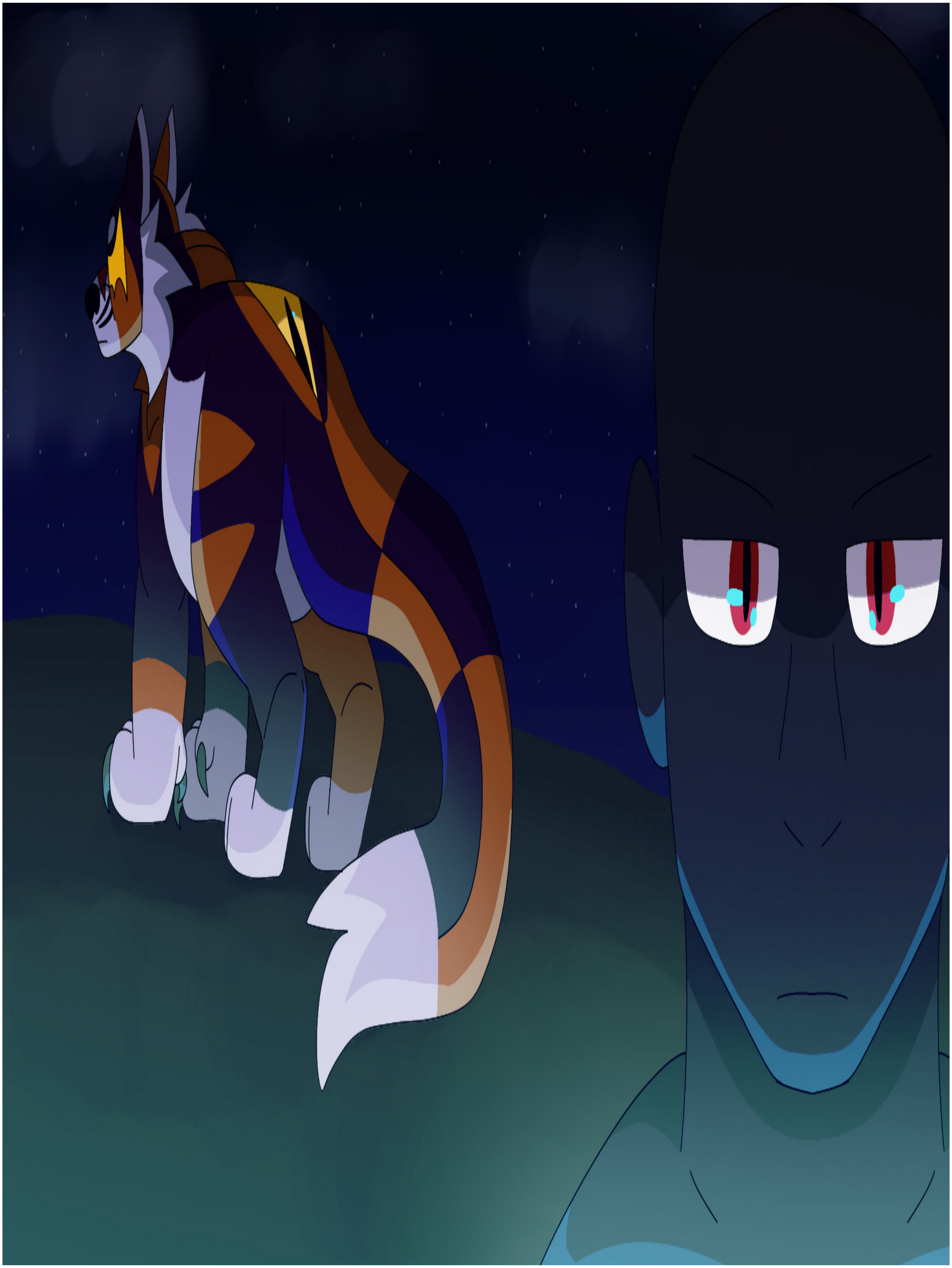


Monotora: “...So then, have you been keepin’ an eye on *them* ?”

???: “...Yes.”

Monotora: “Alright. Well, don’t try anythin’ just yet, y’hear? We wanna see ‘em suffer for as long as possible. When ya given the ‘OK’, go ahead and do it. Got an idea of what it is yet?”

???: “I don’t know.”

Monotora: “Hmph. Ya so damn apprehensive. I guess you got some time to figure it out. But it better be good. Real good.”

???: “...”

CHAPTER 2

Sinning Swimming Dying Diving

12

Chapter End Notes

...

So anyway I'm ending DR96 here-- (/j)

I WANT YOU ALL TO FEEL OUR PAIN AND SUFFERING WE HAD TO ENDURE IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS CHAPTER :,D
R.I.P baby boy you WILL be missed by me (#brocken)

(Also just a note: Kaidou and Saiki's relationship can be viewed as platonic (or romantic) if desired. Monotora only called him his 'boyfriend' because they have no concept of the line between platonic/romantic/etc. relationships and assume gestures like that are sus lmao)

Ah... and now, it's time to vote for the Chapter 3 FTEs! This time, the top 4 results will be shown -- I wonder who it'll be? (conveniently, there's 4 people alive that haven't been shown yet... not to put any ideas in anyone's head or anything lol).

LINK TO POLL:
[CLOSED - sorry!]

Tyvm for reading! <3

Chapter 3: Chained to the Grief (Daily Life)

Chapter Notes

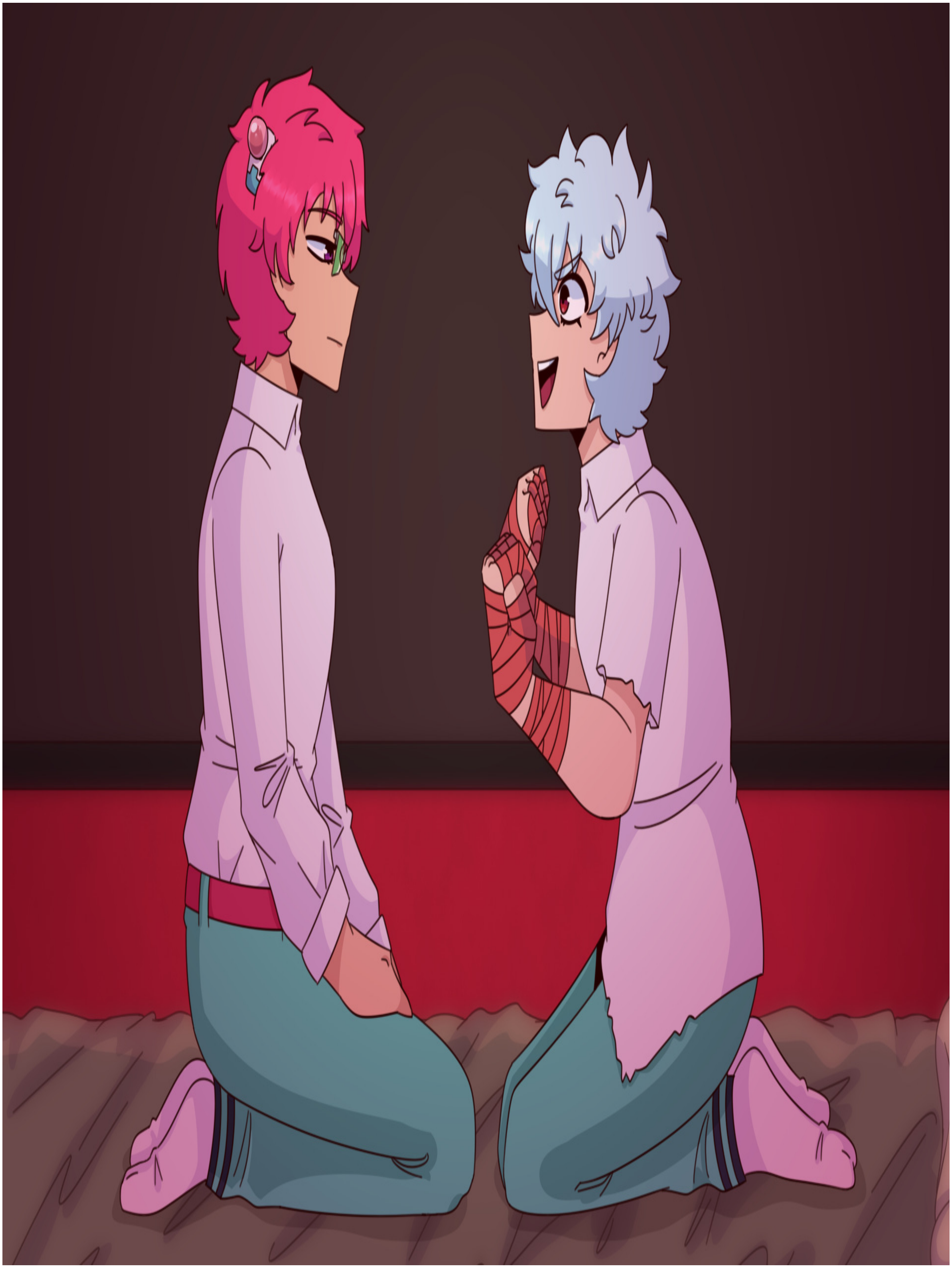
> Y'know when this was initially posted in January, it felt weird describing a tropical island in the middle of cold ass weather... anyway now it's July and I wish we could go back /hj
>
> I'm actually surprised how the word count keeps stacking throughout the fic (26k words for this chapter if you're wondering). I think I might just start listening them for archival reasons lol
>
> Anyway, this chapter contains a lot more art than usual I believe, so I hope you'll enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

???: “Haha… You’re not falling asleep, are you?”

…

Kaidou: “Saiki?”



Saiki: “ *No. Are you* ?”

Kaidou: “Of course not! It’s only the first night – that’s hardly a challenge for me.”

Saiki: “ *Hardly, you say …*”

Kaidou: “I-I’m serious! Anyway, we gotta keep ourselves occupied, so… Shoot, we don’t have any books. Ha, speaking of which, what did you think of the book club today?”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “...A shrug, huh? Still, your idea to write a poem altogether was pretty fun; I never knew how talented Natsuki and Yuri were at writing! I don’t know if you know this, but I myself write in my spare time, heheh. Could you tell what my part of the poem was about?”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “...It was a battle between me and Dark Reunion on the beach! It fit the theme, right?”

Saiki: “*... It sounded like Hiroshi’s case to me* .”

Kaidou: “T-That…Um, what? No way, haha.”

Saiki: “ *And yet all you wrote about was a scarf and boat* .”

Kaidou: “...”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: "...I-I've never seen someone die like that, Saiki. I thought Walter's death was bad, but then after seeing Hiroshi… Before this, I'd hardly seen a proper death at all. Sure, I've been to a funeral before, but I've never *watched* someone die. I've never watched someone die so brutally like that – e-ever."

Saiki: "..."

Kaidou: "I-I can't do it! I don't want to watch someone else die! What if someone else murders again?"

Saiki: " *That won't happen.* "

Kaidou: "B-But… But Hiroshi…"

Saiki: " *Do you really think anyone is going to try after seeing what happened to him?* "

Kaidou: "I-I know, and yet, I keep thinking… I keep thinking what if I was–"

Saiki: " *You're not Hiroshi* ."

Kaidou: "..."

Saiki: "..."

Kaidou: "...Y-Yeah, that's–I-I'm not. I'm not."

Saiki: "..."

Kaidou: "Thank you, Saiki."

Saiki: “ *You don’t need to thank me for that* .”

Kaidou: “Oh… Hey, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *Yes* ?”

Kaidou: “I won’t let you down, okay? That’s a promise.”

***

DING DONG, BING BONG

A soft groan left Hayasaka’s lips. His eyes could barely open. His limbs felt tied to the bed, held in place by weights that refused to lend him breathing space. It was his first proper sleep in four whole days, and yet the hours he clocked hardly did any favours. Eyes now half-open, he stared distantly above at the ceiling, his mind bickering about the pros and cons of giving in and shutting his eyes.

But he knew he couldn’t. He knew he had to go; even just attempting to slip back into sleep would only invoke a guilty feeling in his core.

Hayasaka let a palm slide hazily up his forehead and through his bangs, collecting his glasses from the bedside table aside and begrudgingly swung his legs over the edge of the bed. Stepping out of his room into the hotel corridor a short while later, his eyes accidentally landed on the pair of rooms adjacent to his own: *Saiki and Kaidou’s* .

Hayasaka: (“...Ah god… Saiki, I couldn’t even begin to fathom how you’re doing right now. I remember when we finally left the trial grounds yesterday, he said a word to nobody. All he did was return to his hotel room.”)

Lingering upon Saiki’s room a moment longer, Hayasaka shook his head and tore his eyes away. Turning to the room on the opposite side, he sucked in a short-lived breath. He felt his legs move towards the door and brought up a slightly tremulous hand to knock on the mahogany. Hearing a nonchalant ‘I’m comin’ from the other side, he watched as the door swung open not too long after to reveal Kurumada. Upon seeing the other, his lip twitched into a smile.

Kurumada: “Oh, mornin’ Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Good morning. U-Um, how’re you feeling…?”

Kurumada: “...Er, tired, definitely tired. Heh, what the hell did I expect, though?”

Hayasaka: “It’s the same for me, h-haha…”

Kurumada: “So, uh, ain’t this new? Ya never usually show up knockin’ on my door.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I don’t know, I figured I should return the favour.”

And then, silence. A stark awkwardness enveloped the scene. It was a mixture of pure exhaustion and guilt that left the two at a standstill for a word more. How could they act as if this was any normal day after the deaths of two more people? Hayasaka’s eyes dropped to the floor, fingers curling into weak fists over the thought.

Kurumada: “...Hey, we should head down to the restaurant. I bet Mai’s already down there baking – wouldn’t wanna leave her hangin’ around.”

Hayasaka glanced back up to see a strained smile on Kurumada as his knuckle barely tapped on the doorway to fill the silent air. He nodded in return, and the two walked downstairs. Despite the soft morning glow that bathed the restaurant in a brilliant orange, the air was sorrowful and stagnant. Whoever was already there had hardly engaged in any sort of conversation, either sitting quietly or eating their breakfast with a heavy stomach. Hayasaka would’ve thought to have enjoyed the peace, but now all he yearned for was the overwhelming chatter of content people just one more time.

Even when he and Kurumada spotted Mai walk out the kitchen with a baked goods tray on hand, her face was mellow and caught up in her own tiresome state. She did greet the two, but Hayasaka could tell it was hardly comparable to usual.

Hayasaka: ("Even sleep can catch up with Mai. O-Or perhaps it's not just the lack of sleep, is it…?")

Eventually, the typical late-comers arrived one by one, one in particular appearing sheepish despite her usual bubbly nature.

Latte: "..."

Mai: "Ah, Latte dear…!"

Mai perked up and paced toward Latte.

Mai: "How're you feeling…? Would you like a drink?"

Latte: "Mm, n-no, I'm alright. I'm just… unsure what to feel right now. What happened yesterday – it feels so surreal. If only… If only we were more enthusiastic about finding a new means of escape, then Kaidou would've never felt the need to shoulder the responsibility all by himself and end up doing what he did to Retsuko… Why did I not realise that…?!"

Mai: "Latte – none of this is your fault, alright?"

Latte: "..."

Hayasaka: ("Latte really did love Kaidou, didn't she…? Perhaps it was more of a teacher instinct at first, but it became clear she held a deeper connection to him over the other teens…")

L: "...How about we focus on something we *can* do, then? We need to uncover information about Nesos – the more we know, the more we can use against them."

Jesse: “Jesus, are you really doin’ this again now? It’s way too soon, man.”

Brian: “Yeah, i-it’s just that… we don’t really have many clues to start with, if not any at all.”

L: “And yet, to brush it off is exactly what caused the second murder to occur in the first place.”

Consequently, the room went silent. Not a single word was pronounced harshly, and yet L’s words felt like a tasteless stab.

Hayasaka: (“Is it possible that L’s also feeling bitter after the trial…? Unless he believes lashing out like that is another way of convincing us… And yet, I can’t help but agree. I don’t want to sit around and watch something like that happen again – I don’t think I could handle it. Perhaps…”)

Mid-thought, Hayasaka peered towards the doorway only to pause in his tracks. There stood two newcomers: Natsuki, and Yuri who trailed close behind. The former’s face was struggling to keep neutral, brows ever-so creased as dirty looks began to muster Yuri’s direction. She, however, paid no mind, posture eloquent and calm as if she had never changed demeanour to begin with. They stopped at a table, where Natsuki couldn’t handle the stares anymore, sitting sharply down and folding her arms atop the table. Just as Yuri was to follow her, Hayasaka felt someone beside him step forward.

Kurumada: “How the hell do you have the nerve to show your face again?”

Jesse: “Yeah, like, are we just gonna let her walk around freely n’ shit when she, oh you know, confessed she wants us all to die?!”

Yuri mildly flinched at the shout, but took a deep breath to keep her composure.

Yuri: “...I-I do apologise for becoming excited during the trial. I really couldn’t help myself at the time. And while my beliefs upon the death game are the same as what I’ve explained, in the end my nature is to be reserved.”

Ena: “She can swap her attitude on a whim! Freaky!”

Natsuki: “Hey!”

A sharp screech echoed in the room as Natsuki hastily flew up from her chair.

Natsuki: “Stop saying these things about her! Do you think it’s any help being rude to her? S-She’s clealy not mentally well and it’s all because of this stupid death game that’s gotten to her head! Don’t you realise that? This ignorance is not gonna do anything!”

Monotora: “Oh, I’ve always been more favourable with the mentally unwell, kehehe~!”

Natsuki: “E-Eek! What the–?!”

Monotora stood in the middle of the restaurant, teeth bared in a horrific grin.

Bojack: “When the hell did *they* get here?”

Hayasaka: (“I-I didn’t even hear them walk in this time… Please let this be because of exhaustion…”)

Monotora: “Boy, oh boy, I gotta hand it to ya, Yuri – you really did a number in spicin’ up that last case! Nesos n’ I were surely entertained!”

Yuri: “...What I did wasn’t to excite Nesos, but to foil your plans.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, for *your* suicidal plans.”

Monotora: “Eh, fine, don’t take the compliment then, you ingrate. Not like I’m one to get chummy with my prey. Now, would you all stop bickering like a bunch of ‘gulls? You better get ya asses ready for the openin’ of the new island, hehe.”

Mai: “Another island, is it?”

Monotora: “If you have the energy to be shocked, then you sure as hell got the energy to go n’ see for yourself! I will mention, though, that this island’s vibe is a lil’ different from what ya used to right now – I wonder if you can handle it, kehehe!”

Swaying their tail, Monotora pounced out of the restaurant.

Hayasaka: (“What… What did they mean by a different vibe…?”)

Natsuki: “...”

Yuri: “...”

No one made a move to leave. A moment passed before Hayasaka watched as L slowly rose from his seat and neatly pushed his chair in.

L: “...Well then, I was wondering when they were going to appear. What they said about the new island is rather intriguing – I certainly wish to check it out.”

Latte: “I’d like to as well. I believe… I believe we should all go. Kaidou… he would’ve wanted to do the same.”

Brian: “But, um, what about Saiki…?”

Hayasaka: (“ *Saiki* …?”)

And that was when Hayasaka finally scanned around the restaurant for the boy and faltered. He wasn't here. Saiki wasn't here to begin with at all and he hadn't even noticed.

Hayasaka: ("That… He must still be in his room, mustn't he? He probably hasn't left since yesterday either…")

Ena: "Should we go and retrieve him?"

Bojack: "Let him grieve. After watching whatever the hell kind of screwed up shit his friend suffered, I think sight-seeing is the last thing on his mind."

Mai: "I agree. Such a young boy shouldn't be forced to come out so soon."

Jesse: "S'probably for the best…"

Hayasaka felt his heart tug, pulling at him like an iron chain.

Hayasaka: ("I… I hope he's going to be okay…")

Readjusting his tie to give his hands occupation, he began to follow the group out of the restaurant. Checking the map to see which bridge was listed as the gate to the third island, they trekked towards the north-east bridge and crossed to the other side. The relentless crashing of the tides below did no ease on Hayasaka's mind, only compelling him to imagine Walter's head being held under the waves as he struggled for air or the running of the karaoke bathroom tap on full blast as the microphone stained in Retsuko's blood was washed off. Shoving those thoughts as hard as he could into the back of his mind as he neared the new island, he exhaled a stilted breath out of his nose.

What caught his attention initially was how the scenery felt dry and desolate compared to the lush and lively greenery of the previous islands. The nearby plants and trees had neared their cycle of life, only barely holding on to whatever moist patches of soil could be sucked up for their cracked and overworked roots. Eyes wandering back to the group, he fortunately tuned into a conversation between his friends at the right time.

Mai: “I think we should split off this time, don’t you think? There’s not a lot of people, and we need to cover as much ground as we can.”

Kurumada: “Sure, if that’s what you want. Not like you already split from us last time or nothin’.”

Mai: “Whoopsie… hehe.”

Latte: “Don’t worry, we’ll look extra hard this time. I’m sure we’ll run into each other at some point, anyway.”

Mai and Latte then took off, leaving Hayasaka and Kurumada alone. That was until he heard the soft muttering of a frustrated tablet user and turned on his heel to notice Brian a few metres back awkwardly fiddling with his tablet, tilting it in every which direction as if it would achieve anything.

Hayasaka: “Brian…?”

Brian: “H-Huh–Um, yeah?”

Hayasaka: “Would you like to investigate with me and Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

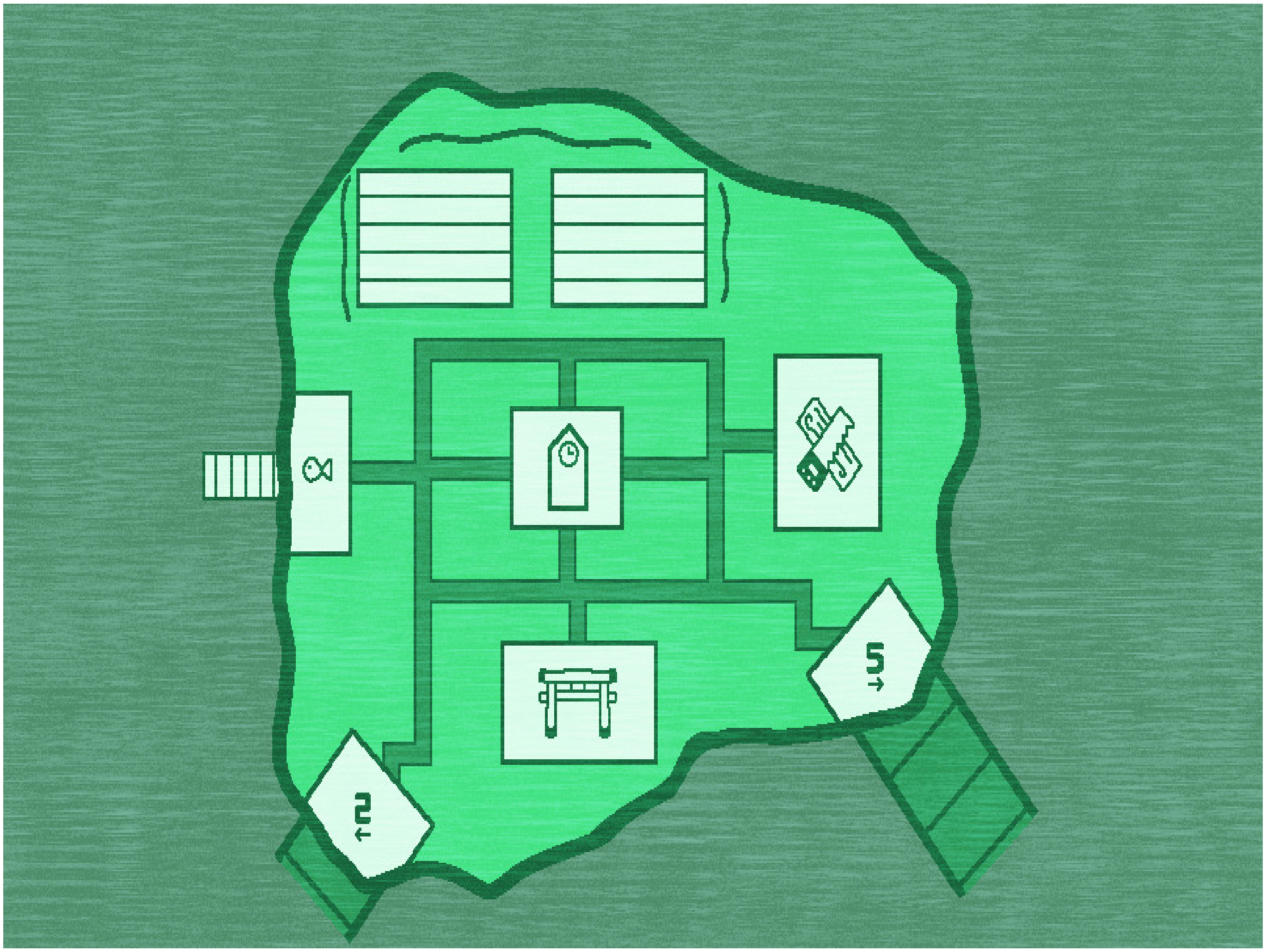
Brian: “Oh, sure! If that’s okay with, um…”

Kurumada: “...Yeah. Go ahead.”

Giving a chaste nod, Brian stepped over to them.

Brian: “I think I got the map working… Here.”

Brian held out his tablet as Hayasaka peered over his shoulder.



Hayasaka: (“This island… it’s nothing like the ones we’ve seen before. None of these places look as if they’re for vacation purposes. In fact, it feels like more of a village than anything – mountain-side houses, a dock… Is this what Monotora meant before?”)

Kurumada: “Well, seein’ it’s just up the path, let’s hit up the docks first.”

Arriving shortly, Hayasaka quickly realised it was a lot smaller than he anticipated. A single wooden pier jutted only a few yards or so out into the ocean, beams covered in sea flora and mould. He decided to make no attempts to board it: the old planks were telling enough that it wasn’t worth the risk. Nearby, however, he spotted Ena alongside Moony gazing meticulously over the area.

Ena: “Hm… Why is there a wooden road leading out into the depths of the ocean?”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s a dock. It’s how it’s supposed to work, haha… Ah, and with the fishing gear lying around, I can only assume it was made for fishing.”

Kurumada: “Now that you mention ‘em, they look a hell of a lot scruffy. ‘Prolly made by hand.”

Ena: “You are too good at this guessing game! If only I could best you with the trivia…”

Brian: “It’s alright. I’ve never been to a dock either, living land-locked and all…”

Hayasaka: (“Is that why Brian had never been to a beach before?”)

Kurumada: “Heh, wonder what was caught here. I could kill for some fresh sushi right about now.”

Ena: “Please! Do not use your big hands to smash down on one of us for your appetite!”

Brian: “H-Huh?!”

Moony: “That would be a show to watch, heheh.”

Hayasaka: “I-Isn’t there sushi in the supermarket though, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “It ain’t the same. Especially the sashimi: it just doesn’t taste right.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder if the nigiri’s alright… Hah, as if this is the time to be sulking over food, h-haha…”)

Looking around a little longer, the three left Ena and Moony to their own investigation as they continued up the path towards the mountain-side houses. It was a clustered neighbourhood, small, irregular sized homes bunched up against each other, spilling over the mountain and around the surrounding flat ground. Most were crafted from brick, wood, and even clay and other less-sturdy materials that would surely be taken out in a tropical storm.

As they reared closer, they passed by a smaller duo, both seeming somewhat shaken.

Hayasaka: "Natsuki? Y-Yuri?" ("I suppose Natsuki wanted to bring her along regardless of what everyone else thought…")

Brian: "Hey, what's wrong?"

Natsuki: "N-Nothing, it's just… We went to look inside some of the houses, you know, in the chance that we'd maybe find someone inside, but instead we stumbled on a house covered with a bunch of blood on the inside. I-It was so… disgusting."

Kurumada: " *Blood* ?"

Hayasaka: "T-That's… unpleasant, haha…"

Yuri: "It was unfortunate, but ironic."

Kurumada: "Like we needed to hear any more crazy shit from you."

Natsuki: "Leave her alone! God, this is why I didn't wanna run into anyone…!"

In a huff, Natsuki stormed off, Yuri calmly catching up to her. Kurumada crossed his arms with a grunt.

Brian: “...Should we go look for ourselves?”

Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m a little curious to confirm it, I suppose.”

It took a little while, but after weaving between rows of houses, they eventually caught sight of a faint trail of blood and followed the splattered path up towards the house in question. Taking a haste glance inside, a nauseating shiver ran down Hayasaka’s spine. Blood covered the walls, the floor, even the ceiling. Blood here, blood there, blood in places he’d expect impossible to be painted. But it wasn’t just blood: pieces of organs and flesh were scattered about, some stuck to the walls, some barely hanging off pieces of furniture. It was like a twisted art display, if not for the sheer viciousness of the torn pieces of remains that felt too real to be faked.

However, from the corner of his wide-eyed vision, he watched as Brian, seemingly unphased, attempted to walk inside only to be grabbed a little too harshly on the shoulder by Kurumada.

Kurumada: “The hell d’ya think you’re going?!”

Brian: “U-Um, inside…?”

Kurumada: “Are you serious? The fuck is wrong with you?”

Brian: “N-Nothing! I’m just a little used to seeing blood covered rooms, I guess? Due to my experience at Sintracorp, I guess I just kinda forgot that it’s not really a usual thing… haha…”

Kurumada: “What…?”

Hayasaka: (“I’m–I’m sorry… *blood covered rooms* ? And here I thought the unhygienic bathrooms were the most concerning aspect of the company…”)

Brian: “...Erm, anyway, do you think these houses are proof that people were living here originally?”

Kurumada: “I guess they were ‘driven out’ if that’s the case.”

Hayasaka: (“But by what? Or who…?”)

Kurumada: “...Y’know, I think we’ve spent enough time eyein’ around here. I think we oughta leave before Hayasaka passes out – his face is pale as shit.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, h-haha… Is that so…?”

Raising a hand up to touch his clammy forehead, Hayasaka supposed he was right. Trekking down the side of the mountain back down to the main path, the three came across a strip of run-down shops, doors and windows planked and bolted shut with materials similar to the houses from before. Hayasaka could imagine in an alternative world, the streets would be bustling with village folk, but for everything to be shut and sealed away felt cold and empty.

Fortunately, there was one shop that wasn’t completely closed off, its open door beckoned for them to check inside. It appeared to be a woodworking shop; there were workbenches covered in sawdust and rows of tools fitted to the wall – some rusted over with decay, but others standing the test of abandonment. Those were the ones being looked over by Jesse, testing some in his grip or just simply wiping off the dust that had collected over time.

Jesse: “Hell to the yeah, man.”

Kurumada: “You seem damn chipper.”

Jesse: “Oh, hey. Yeah, I’m pretty pumped to come across this place. Y’know, bein’ the Ultimate Woodworker n’ all, just in case you forgot.”

Bojack: “So, when am I going to get my own filming set then?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Bojack’s here too? With Jesse? I, well, I wasn’t expecting that… Although, with what happened during the previous case between these two, perhaps they’ve come to terms a little?”)

Jesse: “Lighten up, man. I can teach you some of the ol’ Pinkman techniques if you want.”

Bojack: “Oh yeah, that’s going to be incredibly useful – because making a bunch of wooden tables is going to help us get off this island.”

Jesse: “I’m serious, dickward. It’s a useful skill to have. And, uh, it’ll be cool to spend some time together anyway, like, maybe just have a beer or something. We could both use someone to hang with.”

Bojack stared at Jesse for a moment, then shrugged.

Bojack: “...We’ll see.”

Jesse returned a lopsided smile, going back to aweing at the tools.

Hayasaka: “Ah, so, is there anything of note you two have found here?”

Bojack: “Nope. Just wood and tools. Unless you’re seeing something I’m not.”

Brian: “I guess not…”

After a quick run-down, the three moved on. Circling back around the island, they arrived at a shrine. It appeared considerably more well-kept and elegant than the other more run-down areas so far, and despite the minimal damage here and there, Hayasaka couldn’t help but find it stunning. As his eyes trailed around, he saw a familiar two ladies also looking around, who upon noticing them, waved and walked over.

Mai: “See, we told you we’d run into each other at some point! Hehe. So then, how’re the boys getting along?”

Kurumada: “The *men* are doing fine. What’ve you found so far here?”

Latte: “I think this shrine was for worshipping purposes, as we’ve seen a lot of offerings around. It’s very similar to how some cookies worship the Divine and the Witches.”

Hayasaka: (“Divine? Witches? What on earth are her religions back at home?”)

Mai: “Oh, are you religious then, Latte?”

Latte: “Come to think of it… Not really. I’ve never put much thought into what I believe in, if anything at all, but I’ve never been raised with it.”

Kurumada: “Heh, so this place is pretty useless.”

Latte: “Hm, maybe not. I feel we could use this shrine to reflect back on the people we’ve lost…”

Hayasaka: (“Who we’ve lost… Walter, Hiroshi, Retsuko, and Kaidou… I’m unsure if any of them truly deserved to die, b-but they should’ve never been mixed up in this situation in the first place. None of us should have…”)

Brian: “I… I feel really bad, for them all… Was there nothing we could’ve done to save them?”

Mai: “Aw, chin up, Brian! We must keep going for their sakes – living in the past won’t do you any good. You may get wrinkles frowning like that!”

Brian: “I-I will…?”

Latte: “Haha, ah, Mai’s right. Hum, but do you think we could stick around here a little longer?”

Mai: “Of course! This place is just so pretty, is it not?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose we should take our leave then. We’ll see you later.”

Mai: “See you around~!”

After exchanging goodbyes, Hayasaka and the others crossed the path into the middle of the island toward the only place left to search: the clock tower. From its position alone, partnered with how it overlooked the rest of the island, Hayasaka assumed it was the landmark of the village. Inside, he quickly took notice of a long spiral staircase that stretched all the way to the top of the clock’s mechanism above. Staring at it from below made him feel miniscule, if not a little disorientated. Drifting his eyes back down to the ground floor, he saw L with his back to them.

Hayasaka: “Ah, L… What’re you doing?”

He turned nonchalantly towards them, gesturing to the three to come over.

L: “I’ve just been reading this monument’s information regarding the island we’re currently on.”

Brian: “Oh?”

L: “For such a small village with hardly a considerable population, the villagers were diligent within their craftsmanship and fishing. It appears their main source of export monthly was large sums of fish and woodwork.”

Kurumada: “Huh. Too bad they’re all gone now, eh?”

L: “...That’s certainly one way to word it.”

Brian: “That sounds similar to what I read in that book I found in the library. I-Is there anything else it says?”

L: “Unfortunately, whatever else that was scribed here has been scratched out, presumably by Monotora considering the sharp marks left behind.”

Hayasaka: “Then what about the clock? Do you think it still works?”

L: “I can’t say for sure. I’m not particularly interested in walking up a five-to-ten minute flight of stairs to confirm.”

Kurumada: “That’s pretty damn lazy coming from the guy who wanted to investigate this place the most.”

L: “I’m certain there’s nothing worth it atop, unless you wish to take the time to see for yourself.”

Kurumada: “...S’pose not.”

L hummed and turned back to the monument. The three checked around the ground floor a little more until they deemed their investigation had reached its peak. Returning back to the restaurant, they waited for the rest of the group to meet back up once again.

L: “So then, I assume we’ve all search at least something on the new island. I’ll leave the discussion open for reports. I myself found the clock tower most intriguing. The monument inside detailed the achievements of the villagers who lived there.”

Brian: “Fishing and crafting, right? Just like how the book described it…”

Ena: “Oh! What a coincidence! Me and Moony discovered, what had they called it, oh yes! A dock by the sea! It is where the round up of fishies had occurred.”

Moony: “Why would you wanna catch a slippery lil’ thing anyway? It’s too much work.”

Ena: “Perhaps that is because you do not have hands!”

Jesse: “Hell, and it ain’t just that. There’s also this whole like, street n’ shit, and most of it looked to be craftin’ places, like a carpentry and pottery. Though they’re all boarded up, there’s a woodworking shop that’s still open.”

Mai: “Ah, that must explain why the shrine we found was so beautiful then. Perhaps the villagers built it themselves!”

Bojack: “A shrine? Don’t tell me these people were crazy nutjobs worshipping fire and sacrificing their own Zach Braffs.”

Latte: “I don’t think that was the case…? There was no indication of a particular religion, although I think it’s a great place to go if you need some time alone to think about someone you love.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder if Latte’s words are directed towards anyone in particular. I wonder if… No, I-I said I wouldn’t think about him right now…”)

Natsuki: “...I guess we should go next. Yuri and I investigated the houses at the far end of the island. No one was there, but there was… blood. A lot of blood.”

Yuri: “I think someone was killed there. Maybe even more.”

Kurumada: “You didn’t have to say it out loud…”

L: “...Hm, I see. In regards to the information provided, it is certain that the island we have just investigated had originally belonged to natives that were driven out by force by Nesos in order to renovate the islands for this death game without external disruption.”

Ena: “But they did not need to remove of them! We could have been the best of companions!”

Hayasaka: “T-That seems possible, however. Comparing the newer facilities like the hotel to the brick houses, I’m almost certain they weren’t made by the same people, haha…”

Jesse: “Wait, so why isn’t the new island renovated? Apart from the cameras, the whole thing still looks ancient as hell.”

Brian: “Maybe Nesos didn’t have time to work on it?”

L: “That could very much be the case. However, I figure it may just be a taunt towards us to show what they’re capable of.”

Hayasaka: (“Nesos have somewhat done that already, haven’t they? They said they were the ones responsible for allegedly letting the Oni rampage in Hiroshi’s village… Maybe that’s why L suggested that.”)

Mai: “I couldn’t even begin to imagine how they managed to kill so many innocent people just for this death game…”

Yuri: “ *Sigh* , if only we had all experienced the courtesy of death beforehand, we wouldn’t have to waste our time thinking about this horrible revelation.”

Kurumada: “You insensitive psychopath – is that all you gotta say about this?!”

Bojack: “Or would it be sociopath?”

Yuri: “...If you don’t want me here, I can leave. I can take a hint when I know I’m not wanted.”

And with that, Yuri promptly turned to leave the restaurant.

Natsuki: “Yuri, wait–! Ugh! You all are just–just freaking bullies!”

After her fume, Natsuki stormed off as well.

Latte: “Natsuki, please come back…!”

Mai: “Just leave her be… She’s probably gone to check on Yuri.”

Ena: “Oh dear… has this left our discussion in the ashes?”

Jesse: “I damn hope so. I’m just about ready to sit down n’ have a smoke. That last motive’s still kickin’ my ass right now.”

It was gradual, but the group began to break apart for the day, no longer willing to come up with any more goals at this point. Whether it was because of their mutual fatigue, or the failures from before that put them off, Hayasaka didn’t know. But even he had to admit all he wanted to do after walking around such an unnerving island was rest for a while.

Nearing the evening, Hayasaka found himself wandering around the hotel rooms aimlessly. After reminiscing upon Retsuko outside her door, he turned on his heel only to halt sharply a step or two later. What stood in front of him startled him into silence.

Hayasaka: (“Ah… S… *Saiki* …?”)

The sun outside had begun to sink into the horizon, and only supple light seeped through the windows, but Hayasaka couldn’t mistake the bright green lenses and pink pins for anyone else.

Hayasaka: (“I… I wouldn’t imagine seeing him roaming outside his room so soon…”) “S-Saiki…? Are you alright?”

The second he spoke up in the desolate hall, the boy snapped his attention toward him and his eyes grew wide.

And then he was gone.

Hayasaka blinked. And then blinked again. Rubbing his eyes and shaking his head still did no favours to confirm anyone was still there to begin with.

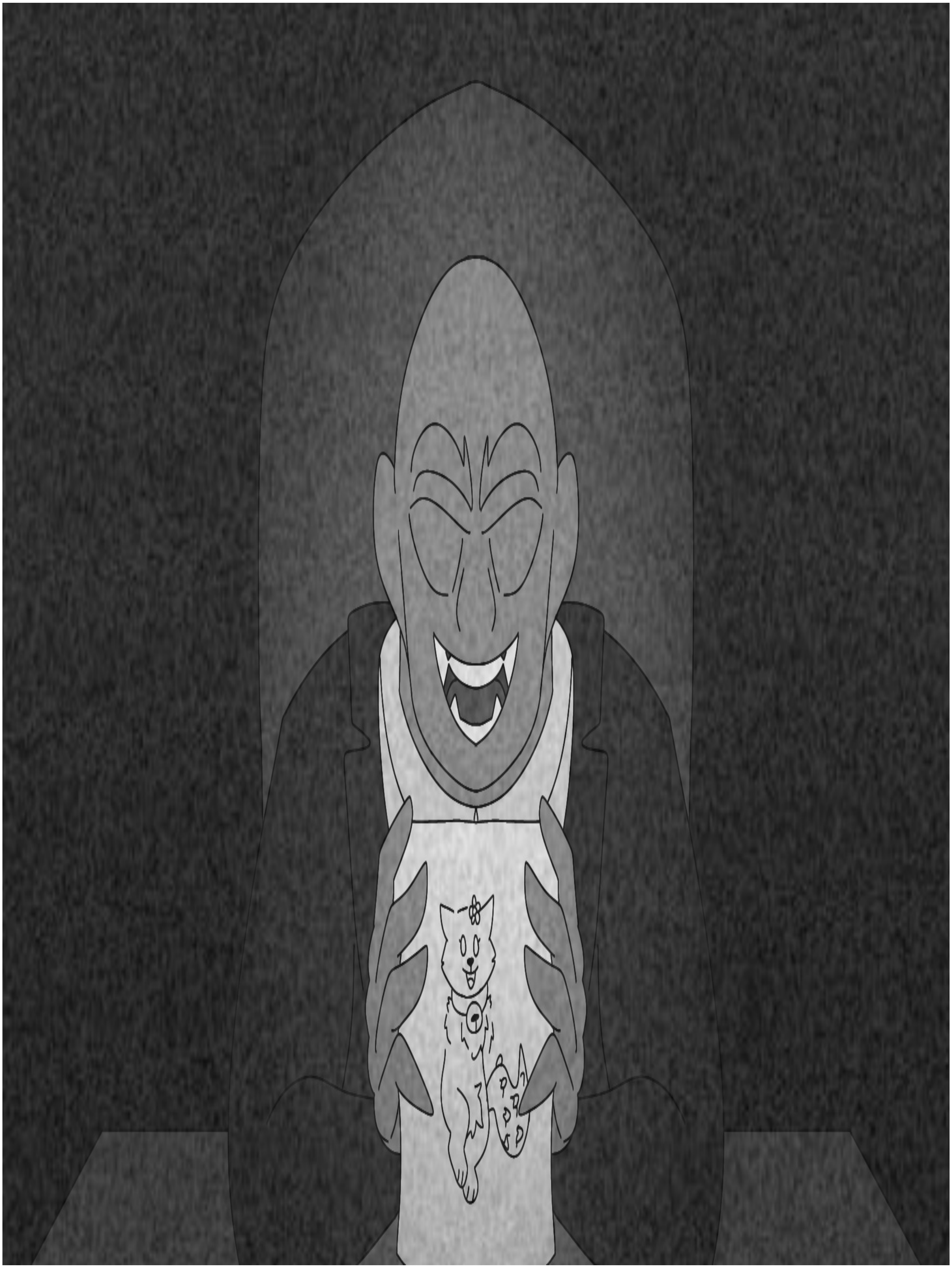
Hayasaka: (“That… What was that? That wasn’t Saiki, was it…? No, No, I swore I… Ah, surely I’m just seeing things in the dark. Saiki would’ve never been out and about in the first place…”)

Time passed by as per usual from then on, until the nighttime announcement rang through the island. Hayasaka returned to his room, sitting on the edge of his bed as he readied himself for sleep.

Hayasaka: (“…I can’t stop thinking about what L said this morning about investigating into Nesos. If he believes doing so will prevent any more murders to occur, then… I feel a strong resolve to do the same. I can’t just sit by and let a company get away with something so inhumane as the death game without being found out. I-I’d rather curse them to hell, h-haha…”)

Ending on that thought, Hayasaka soon went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???#1: “Hello? You wanted to talk to me about something?”

???#2: “Ah, just the person I needed. Do come in.”

???#1: “Is it something about the project? Or are we discussing other things?”

???#2: “It’s a bit of both. You see… watching my robot wander around that room aimlessly whilst devouring every piece of meat you feed it day after day — it reminded me of something… The thing is, I noticed a long time ago when I was designing that tiger, someone else decided to draw a robot too, I guess a little friend for it just for fun? Heh, so I decided to scour around to find it again, and…”

???#1: “...You want the engineering team to build another one?”

???#2: “Precisely! I figured that having a pocket sized friend could make the thing less lonely. That fat beast is miserable in their room and refuses to listen to anyone because they think you're all a threat to them, and they especially ignore *my* orders which, might I add, *aren't* supposed to happen.”

???#1: The drawing looks unfinished — how is the team supposed to make that design a possibility if it’s missing basic limbs? It doesn’t even have any arms.”

???#2: “ *You* add the arms then, for God’s sake. Make them so small you can hold them in your arms just like you would with a pet cat. Sort out all the programming stuff so the beast doesn’t mistake them as food. Make it a girl with lighter colours, y’know, like a girl’s toy. Give her a name that means something: since she's got flowers you can name her after whatever flower that's on her body. That and all the other damn things I could list right now.”

???#1: “...I’ll… go discuss this with the team about this now then.”

???#2: “Excellent~… Oh! And one more thing."

???#1: "Huh?"

???#2: " *Don't disappoint me again.* "

DING DONG, BING BONG

When Hayasaka awoke, the one thing on his mind as he moved to prepare himself for the day was to locate L and ask him about helping him out with his investigation. Stepping into the restaurant, he wrung his cuffs as he scoped out the scene. He faltered after realising L wasn't present at all.

Hayasaka: ("Just my luck, huh? Getting all worked up over nothing when I know he's a typical late-commer, haha…")

Brewing himself a coffee in defeat, Hayasaka waited for the detective to show. Someone did eventually stroll into the restaurant that caught his attention, although not L.

Kurumada: "G'mornin."

Hayasaka: "Good morning, Kurumada."

Kurumada: "So, how're ya doin'? You look like you're about to leap off ya heels or somethin', bwaha."

Hayasaka: "Oh, um, i-it's nothing, haha…"

Kurumada: "Right, yeah. So… There's this, uh, thing I've been meanin' to ask ya–not, uh, meaning but more so something I wanted to ask… Okay that kinda sounds like the same thing but I swear it ain't."

Hayasaka couldn't help but raise a brow at the other's unusual gauche attitude.

Hayasaka: "What is it…?"

Kurumada: “...Could–Could, uh… Damnit, come n’ meet me at the–!”

Mai: “Hello~! Are you two busy currently?”

Hayasaka: “Mai? Um, y-yes, we–”

Kurumada: “WE AIN’T!”

Both Hayasaka and Mai paused, drawing a blank expression towards Kurumada. After a moment of lingering silence, Mai cleared her throat and clasped her hands together.

Mai: “That’s wonderful! Then I don’t suppose you two mind coming to bake with Natsuki and a few others, hm?”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Why so?”

Mai: “I’ve always wanted to try a little baking with Natsuki, you see! Since we share such similar talents, it only makes sense we’d put our best efforts together. I just think a few helping hands would make her feel more comfortable; it’d be good to get her mind off Yuri’s situation for a short while.”

Kurumada: “I appreciate the offer, but I’m no good at baking. Hell, I’ll ‘prolly burn the kitchen down if ya let me in there.”

Hayasaka: “...I-I suppose don’t mind, as long as I’m just being given directions on what to do.”

Mai: “Of course! You can find me and the others in the kitchen when you’re finished with Kurumada, hehe.”

Mai smiled and walked off.

Hayasaka: “So, ah, what was it you wanted to ask me again?”

Kurumada sucked in a heavy breath, and sighed as he crossed his arms.

Kurumada: “D’ya think you can meet me on the beach later on in the evening? Say around 8P.M.?”

Hayasaka: “T-That, um… s-sure.”

Kurumada: “Great, great…”

Rubbing the back of his neck, Kurumada glanced around as the air between them grew quiet. He then cursed under his breath.

Kurumada: “I’m gonna get some air. You better not leave Mai waitin’.”

Hayasaka nodded as he watched the other leave the restaurant with a clenched fist. Staring down into his coffee mug and watching how the caramel liquid shook slightly in his grip, he flushed.

Hayasaka: (“...Why did Kurumada ask me such a thing? I wonder what he has planned… Ah, there’s no point worrying about it right now. I should probably finish up and head to the kitchen.”)

Inside the kitchen, Hayasaka found Mai and Natsuki, alongside Latte and Ena, preparing the ingredients and equipment they were to use for whatever recipe they had planned. The former two noticed his appearance, and while Mai offered a wave, Natsuki raised a brow.

Natsuki: “What’s he doing here?”

Hayasaka: (“What a welcoming start…”)

Mai: “I simply invited Hayasaka to come bake with us, just the same with Latte and Ena!”

Hayasaka tried an awkward nod in assertion. Natsuki curtly crossed her arms.

Natsuki: “I guess he’s okay. He’s the least likely to try anything weird, anyway.”

Hayasaka: “U-Um?”

Mai: “Hahaha! Aw, Natsuki, there’s nothing to worry about! You don’t know what way he swings, you know~.”

Hayasaka: “ *H-Haha… Mai please be quiet* .”

Ena: “May I inquire what we are to be baking today?”

Natsuki: “Heh, cupcakes, obviously.”

Latte: “That sounds fun! Ah, but I’m unsure what I’m able to do on my own, as I’m rather terrible around ovens.”

Mai: “There’s no fret – I’ll make sure you won’t have to touch a single oven!”

Latte: “Thank goodness, haha.”

Assigning their roles, the five then rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

FLOUR
SUGAR
FLOUR

Sometime during the session, it had come to the point where Hayasaka had been tasked with mixing one of the bowls of batter until it was as smooth as possible. Focusing on making sure no lumps could escape his half-fatigued grip, he hadn't paid mind to Mai edging ever-so subtly towards him until she was right beside him.

Mai: "So then… What were you and Kurumada discussing earlier, hm?"

Hayasaka: "Ah, that is… I-It was just small talk. We practically do it every morning."

Mai: "Don't think I can't see through that lie as clear as day, Hayasaka. With the way Kurumada was acting and all, you and I both know that wasn't just 'small talk'. Come now, you can tell me – I promise to keep it a secret."

Hayasaka: "T-That's not really the problem–ah… *Sigh* , all he did was ask me to meet him at the beach later on tonight. It's nothing special."

As soon as the words left his lips, Mai gasped, almost dropping her own bowl. She then let out a giddy squeal, causing Hayasaka to jolt and hold out his hand to frantically quiet her. Mai composed herself, but leaned into Hayasaka.

Mai: "You do realise Kurumada asked you on a *date* , don't you?"

Hayasaka: "A-A date? Why would it be a date…? We're not dating, h-haha…"

Mai: "Tsk, tsk… Tell me something, Hayasaka. How would you describe your relationship with Kurumada currently?"

Hayasaka's mixing slowed to a stop. His eyes drifted to the counter below, mind enveloped in the ponderous question.

Hayasaka: "I… I would say that we're close friends."

Mai: “Mm, fine. But are you going to simply remain as close friends forever?”

Hayasaka didn’t know how to reply, his mind at a loss. From the lack of response, Mai shook her head and gently patted his arm.

Mai: “Ah, don’t mind me. I’m only teasing you. Your feelings are up to you to figure out.”

Latte: “Mai! I need a little help over here – I think I accidently got some egg shell in the mixture…”

Mai: “I’m right there, Latte! Excuse me, Hayasaka.”

Mai then dashed over to Latte, giving back Hayasaka some breathing space. But as he finally got back into a steady momentum on the mixing, another person had appeared beside him, although more hesitant in her stance.

Natsuki: “Hey, I’ve just come to check you’re not screwing up or anything…”

Peering into his bowl, Natsuki gave a brisk nod.

Natsuki: “...You’re doing a good job.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, t-thank you, but I’m only following orders.”

Natsuki: “...Um, I overheard your conversation with Mai.”

Hayasaka: “Y-You did?”

Natsuki: “Jeeze, I’m not going to judge you or anything! I won’t tell anyone about it, alright?”

Hayasaka: “That still isn’t the point…”

Natsuki: “Anyway, I was just thinking that maybe… you could bring a cupcake with you later for Kurumada.”

Hayasaka: “...I suppose that isn’t a bad idea.”

Natsuki: “Heh, sweets always go down in making a good impression. But you should definitely give him a chocolate one – that’s gotta be his go-to flavour.”

Hayasaka: “Wh–How did you know that…?”

Natsuki: “Hehe, let’s just say I’m good at guessing someone’s favourite flavours based on their personality alone. Hm, I have my bets on yours being vanilla, am I right?”

Hayasaka: “Haha, I suppose I really do have a basic taste…”

Natsuki: “Eh, I mean one of my friends, Monika, also likes vanilla. I’m, um… I’m also doing the same for Yuri, that’s why I brought it up. Green-tea – that’s the flavour she likes.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I see. Hopefully she’ll appreciate it.”

Natsuki: “Me too…”

Time passed, and soon enough, Hayasaka watched as four batches of cupcakes were slid into the oven: chocolate, green-tea, vanilla and strawberry. But it wasn’t time to catch a break, however, as they soon got back into the swing of things to prepare the frosting and other decorative ingredients. Hayasaka couldn’t help but peek from out of the corner of his eye at Mai and Latte messing around with a bowl of icing: Mai dipping her finger into the mixture and playfully flicking it at the other. Seeing this hijink go down as well, Ena proceeded to copy the action with Moony, who in turn managed to catch the sugary paste in her mouth much to their shock. Needless to say, Natsuki frustratedly vocalised that they weren't to play around with the mixtures anymore.

When it was time to begin decorating the baked goods fresh out of the oven, Mai handed a cupcake over to Natsuki.

Natsuki: "Huh?"

Mai: "I think you should be the one to teach us how to decorate the cakes in your way. You are the Ultimate Cake Decorator after all – I'd love to see you in action."

Natsuki: "U-Um, well… D-Do you all have to be staring at me like that?!"

Ena: "I apologise for my eyes' direction on you! Please do not glare at me with such sour pupils!"

Natsuki: "Hmph. Fine – we can start with the frosting first. Just watch and learn, okay?"

Natsuki demonstrated how to transform a plain cupcake into a fluffy white cat, and the others attempted to follow her method. Hayasaka found it oddly stress-relieving to design the cats, carefully applying the chocolate chip eyes with satisfactory symmetry.

Hayasaka: ("Ah, I wonder what Gin would think about this if he was here. Perhaps he'd like some dog ones too. I would suggest alligators, but I don't think they'd be the easiest to make at a beginner level…")

Natsuki: "Huh? How'd you even make one look like yourself?"

Moony: "I have my ways, heheh."

Latte: "Oh dear–"

Latte sheepishly held up the cupcake she was working on.

Latte: “–my kitty looks deformed.”

The group shared a chuckle over the appearance of the poor cat. After a gruelling team effort to get the rest of the cupcakes decorated, Natsuki stepped back to gaze upon their hard work displayed on the four trays. As they anticipated her approval, she nodded and placed her hands on her hips.

Natsuki: “These look pretty nice. Goob job, everyone.”

Mai: “You’re too kind! None of our work could ever come close to yours, however.”

Natsuki: “Um, t-thanks… And, ah, thank you, everyone, for doing this with me. It was fun.”

Latte: “Aw, I was happy to! Although I wasn’t all that confident, I tried to put my all in it for you.”

Ena: “I am very certain that these sweets will taste as scrumptious as they appear – let’s just hope the kitty cats do not mind our greedy mouths.”

Natsuki giggled, a warm sense erupting in Hayasaka’s chest at the sight. Unfortunately, they still had one more task to complete, and that was to clean up the mess they had left the kitchen in. With five pairs of hands, however, the job went by quicker than expected. Before they all parted ways for the rest of the day, Natsuki tapped Hayasaka and gestured to the cupcake trays now wrapped in foil.

Natsuki: “Hey, you can come back and get your cupcake for Kurumada whenever you need to. The chocolate ones are on the second tray.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, thank you, Natsuki.”

With the remainder of the day at his disposal until the evening, Hayasaka decided to pass the time by finding someone to talk to.

Hayasaka: (“It’s simply becoming the norm at this point for me, huh? It never hurts to reach out, haha…”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Ena at the beach.

Ena: “I have been following the large sphere in the sky for quite some time… But why does it pain me to directly gaze into its glow?”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Ena. Would you like to talk once more…?”

Ena: “A distraction from the orb? Do I take such a dare? Perhaps I shall favour my eyes elsewhere!”

Hayasaka spent some time with Ena. Still unsure on what to give them, he settled for gifting them a strangely coloured microchip.

Ena: “There it is! I have found my next item! Time to move onto the next world and travel forth!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? What’re you talking about?”

Ena: “Is this not my goal? Have I been duped? How terrible! And yet, I will remain attached in case it becomes of greater use!”

Hayasaka: (“So that means they liked it, right? Haha…”)

Ena: “Ah yes, the next conversation of the many conversations to come! I wonder what we shall discuss today?”

Hayasaka: “Well… I’d like to know how long you’ve known Moony for. Since she’s here with you, and I assume she doesn’t have an ultimate talent herself, I’m curious if there’s a reason why.”

Moony: “I *so* have an ultimate! Ultimate skateboarder! That’s what I would call myself. Have you seen the flip kicks I can do? Heh.”

Ena: “While the concept of time is unknown to me, I am assured we have been companions for a long, long time!”

Moony: “You could think of it as, like, friends since the start of time. Cool, right?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose you two know a lot about each other then?”

Ena: “Indeed! I once trekked an impeccably dangerous journey of utmost importance to see Moony. There were many friends to foe chanting that I stay away, but once I had begun, I could not turn back!”

Hayasaka: “What was it for?”

Ena: “To give her a gift, of course!”

Moony: “Giving me gifts is a major important thing, you know? Hey, why haven’t you been giving me anything?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, I-I’m sorry…”

Ena: “Nonsense Moony! Do not squeeze the man dry of his possessions! Come, we will share the rations.”

Hayasaka: “...S-So what was the gift?”

Ena: “The gift was Moony all along!”

Hayasaka: “What…?”

Moony: “Ugh, Ena, you’re scaring people again. Not cool.”

Ena: “Oh dear! Oh oh oh dear! I’m such a failure! I feel like I’m melting into my own sorrow… No one bear their sight upon the disappointment!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Ena… I-I’m not scared by you.”

Moony: “Just ignore their outburst.”

Hayasaka: “Then why did you say that in the first place?”

Moony: “The slightest mention of a sad thing ticks them off. They told me they don’t mind if I trigger them as long as I keep them in check: that’s why I like them.”

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“If so, I wonder how Ena has managed to co-exist with the group this whole time with the death game and everything…”)

The two parted ways after a little while.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, that reminds me, I was trying to look for L earlier, wasn’t I? I suppose I got so distracted with the baking that I forgot.”)

Picking back up on his search, Hayasaka scanned the islands for L. He eventually found him at the hotel, standing outside one of the rooms. However, as Hayasaka stepped closer, he saw it wasn’t his own, but Saiki’s. As L continued to knock and mutter something against the door, Hayasaka cocked a brow.

Hayasaka: (“What is he doing…? Outside Saiki’s room no less…”) “Ah, L, h-hello…”

L: “...Hm? Oh, Hayasaka. Was there something you needed from me?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, actually, um… It’s about the investigation you're doing on Nesos currently. I was thinking I could perhaps help out, if you don’t mind.”

L: “Really now? You’re the first one to willingly want to help, let alone ask me directly about it.”

Hayasaka: “I am? Haha, it’s just that I feel as if sitting around and doing nothing would be a bad choice of action, but since I’m not very capable physically to fight against Nesos or anything, I can at least put forth my mental strengths.”

L: “And right you are with those mental strengths: you’ve proved yourself plenty in the trials thus far. You’re a lot more competent than you seem. I believe you’d make a perfect aid to my investigation… only if you could help me out first.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, with this…?”

Hayasaka gestured hesitantly towards Saiki’s hotel room, and L nodded.

L: “I’m attempting to convince Saiki to come out of his room so I could ask him a few questions. Nothing too tough, I’m simply curious about something.”

Hayasaka: “I… I’m not sure about that. Saiki probably still needs some time to himself – I mean, that should be clear enough why he’s not answering so far, right? H-Haha…”

L: “I believe he will open up after some coercion. Have a go; perhaps a different voice will persuade him.”

Hayasaka stared at Saiki's door for a short moment, before sighing. Stepping up to the door, his fist wavered in the air for a moment before gently knocking.

Hayasaka: "S-Saiki… Please may you open the door?"

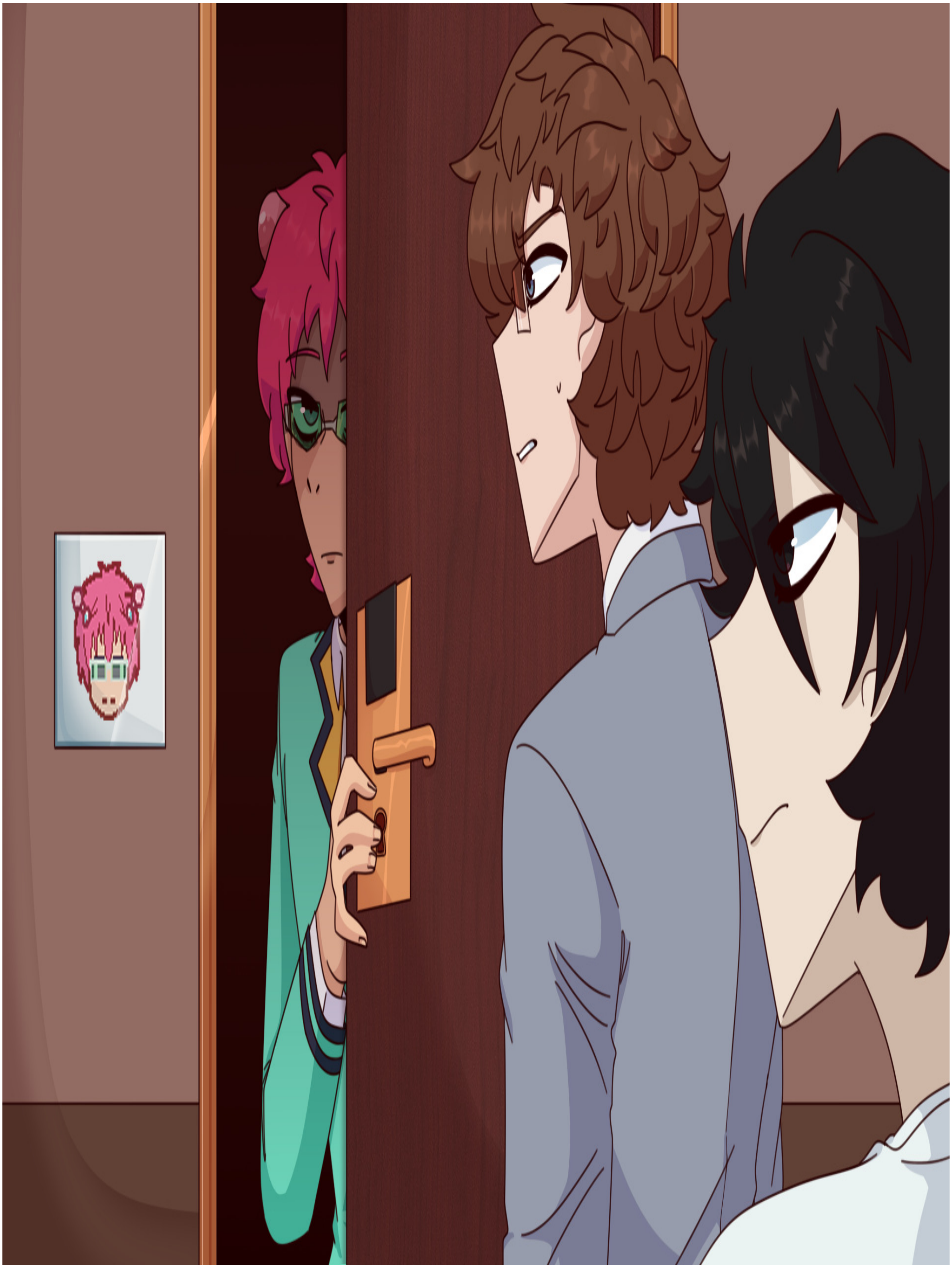
Waiting for any sort of response, Hayasaka expectedly found none. Taking a side glance at L, he gestured for him to continue.

Hayasaka: "I… I-It's me, Hayasaka, haha… I just wanted to check up on you. I'm… worried about you…"

Again, nothing. Hayasaka was ready to give up until he heard the soft click of the door being unlocked, and he held his breath. The door caved in a fraction, just enough space for him to be able to see Saiki standing on the other side.

Hayasaka: "Ah…"

Saiki: "..."



The peach light from the hall shone onto his face, revealing his tired and heavy complexion: dark rings had formed at the bottom of his eyes, and his frown was slightly more curved than usual. Even his hair and clothes appeared somewhat ruffled and messy. Hayasaka's heart sank, feeling his gut twist at the sight of the boy.

In the midst of his gawking, he realised he hadn't spoken a word, and watched as Saiki's eyes trailed slightly past his shoulder, where L was standing. L took this as an opportunity to approach the door.

L: "Hello, Saiki. I only want to ask you a few ques–"

But as soon as he began to reach his hand out to push the door open, Saiki had immediately slammed it shut, retracting his hand quickly before it could get caught in the haze. The sound echoed in Hayasaka's mind like a barrage before L dryly chuckled.

L: "...He's a tough one. My fingers could've been cut clean off."

Hayasaka: "We–We shouldn't have done that. He's probably feeling worse now.."

L: "Don't blame yourself. I'd call this progress if anything. I'm going to keep trying myself if you don't mind."

Hayasaka: "Are you sure? It feels to me like Saiki doesn't want any company right now…"

L: "He can't stay in his room forever."

Hayasaka: "I-I understand, but… Ah, if you insist. G-Good luck, I suppose."

As L went back to his one-sided attempts to communicate with Saiki, all Hayasaka could do was slowly leave.

Hayasaka: (“Out of all people, why Saiki? Why does L need to talk to Saiki so badly? Didn’t he see how terrible he looked? Surely he’ll give up soon, right? I can only hope he does…”)

Seeing he had some time left to kill before evening, Hayasaka went to find someone to talk to.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Yuri in the library.

Yuri: “I would’ve thought a quiet island would be ideal, but it just feels so unnatural to me…”

Hayasaka: “...Hello, Yuri. Would you like to talk for a while?”

Yuri: “Hah… I suppose we could, if you came all this way to ask… I’m just surprised you wanted to talk with me.”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t see the harm, right?”

Hayasaka spent some time with Yuri. Unsure what she would like, he gifted her a fountain pen.

Yuri: “A-Ah…”

Hayasaka: “Is it alright? I only assumed, since you liked novels and all, that you also enjoy writing…?”

Yuri: “Oh, n-no! I don’t dislike it or anything! It’s very… n-nice. Thank you.”

Hayasaka: (“Although she appears a little hesitant, I’m glad she liked it.”)

Yuri: “…”

Hayasaka: (“Despite being the one to initiate the conversation, I can't seem to find where to start. I can see how timid Yuri is: I know she doesn’t want to start either. Ah, but I’m the adult here, aren’t I? I might as well suck it up for her sake…”) “So, ah, Yuri… W-What granted you the title of Ultimate Novel Enthusiast?”

Yuri: “…My favourite type of literature is novels. I love to get lost in the worlds described by only the author’s words, where I can forget about the real world for a few hours with a cup of tea beside me. Perhaps that’s why I was given such a talent…?”

Hayasaka: “I see. And, what do you mean by ‘forget the real world’?”

Yuri: “U-Um, that? I’m… not very sociable, if I have to be honest. N-Nor do I have many friends. But, I’m alright with that. I’ve never liked attention: I’d much rather be the background character strolling through the park, getting lost between the trees rather than be the centre of everyone’s attention at the nearby fountain, if that makes sense. I’m very much unlike the other club members, Sayori and Monika, who love to be social butterflies.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I can see where she’s coming from with that, haha. I’m also a man who blends into the background, whether I like it or not. But… I really would like it to remain that way.”)

Yuri: “…Y-You don’t think I’m weird for this, do you?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, no. You sound completely normal to me, Yuri.”

Yuri: “Ah, t-that’s good… Haha, I’m surprised to hear that from anyone, really.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Um… S-So, on the topic of novels, would you say you have a favourite?”

Yuri: “Hum… I don’t really have favourites. However, I am currently reading a novel titled ‘Portrait of Markov’.”

Hayasaka: “Really now? Haha, perhaps you could share a little with me?”

Yuri: “As in, read it together?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t mind…”

Yuri: “…U-Um, I have to go find Natsuki now. I’m sorry.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? T-That’s okay…” (“I’m a little confused why she had to leave so soon, unless what I asked her made her comfortable. Ah, jeeze, I shouldn't have been so forward, shouldn’t I? I hope I can clear things up next time…”)

As time reared towards 8P.M., Hayasaka began to make his way towards the beach after retrieving his cupcake from the kitchen. He realised he hadn’t spent much time there preceding Walter’s murder, but the melidous churns of the mild waves were soothing enough to tranquilise his state and remind him of why he couldn’t avoid such a lovely place for long. He spotted Kurumada gazing out into the ocean with his arms crossed loosely, although there was a hint of nervousness grazed across his face. Crunching the sand underneath his loafers as he approached, Hayasaka hid the cupcake he was holding behind his back.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello. I hope I’m not late.”

Kurumada whipped his head towards him, lips upturning into a pleasant grin.

Kurumada: “Hey, you! Nah, you ain’t late – only been waitin’ out here for a minute or two anyhow.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, so, what did you want to do?”

Kurumada: “How ‘bout we just start walkin’, eh?”

Hayasaka, albeit somewhat confused, nodded, and Kurumada began to lead the two down the coastline. Hayasaka watched the tide pull back and forth against the sand, the salty water shimmering coolly in the low evening light.

Kurumada: “So, how’s your day been?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Um, it was fine. The baking session with Mai and the others was fun – I suppose it was sort of like a make-up of the ‘girls-trip’ they never got to experience before, m-minus Retsuko and Yuri and plus me… Ah, speaking of which…”

Hayasaka revealed the cupcake from behind his back and held it out to the other.

Hayasaka: “I made this for you.”

Kurumada shifted into surprise at the unexpected gift, but took it with a noise of gratitude.

Kurumada: “Heh, thanks. The decoration’s kinda cutesy; I didn’t think you’d make somethin’ like this.”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, it was actually Natsuki’s idea, haha…”

Kurumada: “I like it, though.”

Peeling away at the wrapper, Kurumada stole a bite. Hayasaka saw his face practically lit up as he hummed in delight.

Kurumada: “Shit, this is good. Like, really good. Ya definitely swayed me over with the chocolate.”

Hayasaka: “Haha, that was also Natsuki’s idea, believe it or not.”

Kurumada: “Impressive, if not the slightest bit creepy.”

Kurumada continued to work away at the treat as they continued beside the waves, gradually slipping into a more orange shade as the sun slowly set.

Kurumada: “...S’a real shame we don’t live closer to the sea back at home, huh? We’re missin’ out on sights like this.”

Hayasaka: “I hardly ever noticed how beautiful the sunset was until now. I suppose being caught up in work does that to you…”

Kurumada: “Same here. Makes me think I need more time to myself – too many harshly lit rings and bar nights with friends, y’know?”

Hayasaka: “Haha, p-perhaps… How are your friends doing then?”

Kurumada: “Decent enough. Though, apparently Q-Taro’s goin’ through some tough luck with his baseball team at the moment. That’s what he wrote to Mai, at least.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you mean from the first motive? Mai never told me what was in her letter, come to think of it…”

Kurumada: “It’s fine. I was the one to pry her about it anyhow.”

Around this time, Kurumada had taken the last bite from what was left of the cupcake, crumpling up the wrapper and aiming it behind him. Before he could toss it, however, Hayasaka shot him a look. He then proceeded to sheepishly tuck it into his pocket.

Kurumada: “...I can wait ‘til we find a trash can.”

Hayasaka: “ *Sigh* , and here we were just talking about how pretty the beach was…”

Kurumada: “Gahaha, you’re so damn responsible.”

Hayasaka: “O-One of us has to be.”

Kurumada: “And I like the balance. But, y’know what I like more?”

Kurumada then stopped in his tracks, taking a hold of Hayasaka’s hand. Hayasaka’s eyes widened at the gesture, staring at the other in anticipation. A few beats passed, and Kurumada’s sight flicked aside for a moment.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka, I… I have somethin’ important to get off my chest.”

Hayasaka: “What… What is it?”

Leaning closer towards him, Kurumada held a soft expression.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka… I–”

???: “ *HISS* !”

Hayasaka didn’t know how or when it happened, but Monotora had jumped out of the bushes, sending loose branches and leaves flying every which way as they thumped onto the sand with a thud. Startled, the two let go of their hands, Hayasaka stumbling back at the fright.

Monotora: “What the *hell* are you two doing?!”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, that…”

Kurumada: “It ain’t none of your fuckin’ business, dammnit!”

Monotora: “I think you’ll find it *is* my business to watch over every one of you damn idiots to make sure you kill each other, not kiss each other!”

Hayasaka: “W-What?!”

Kurumada: “Argh! I’ve had enough of your shit, y’hear me?!”

Monotora: “That’s too bad, kehehe. I’m feelin’ kinda hungry right now, so unless you want your little beach walk to end in bein’ eaten alive as a two-course meal, you should head back to the hotel.”

Kurumada: “Gh…”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, l-let’s just go, alright?”

Kurumada: “...Fine.”

Monotora: “I don’t mind if ya wanna stay n’ fill my stomach for tonight, heheh.”

Ignoring Monotora’s taunts, the two strode past and returned back to the hotel.

Kurumada: “ *That damn tiger…* Uh, sorry we had to cut our time short back there.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, it’s alright. I enjoyed it. I wish we could do something like that again in the future.”

Hayasaka watched as Kurumada flushed, then chuckled as he pat Hayasaka on the back.

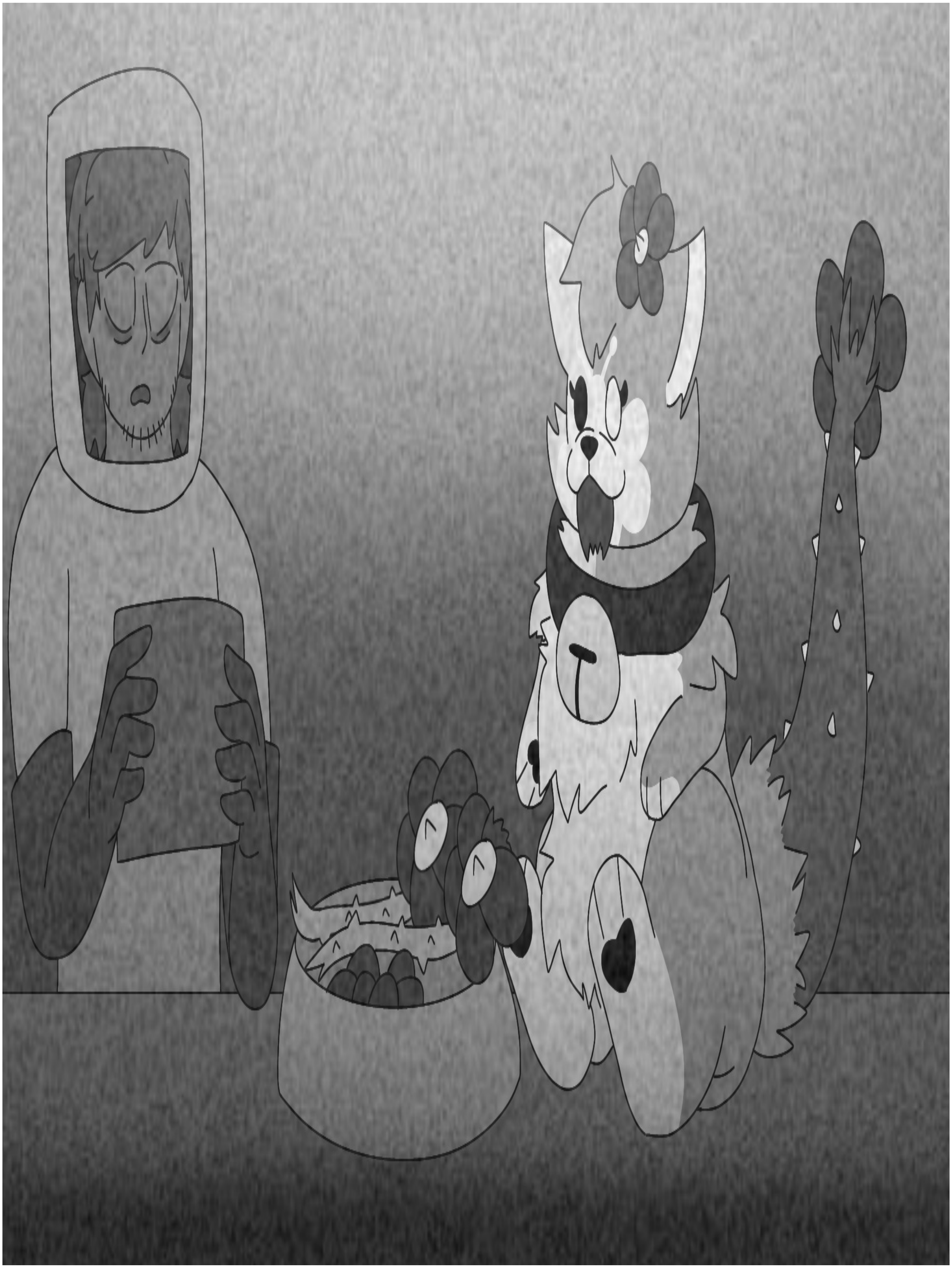
Kurumada: “Heh, I’d love ta.”

Exchanging goodnights, the two returned to their rooms for the night.

Hayasaka: ("It's a little jarring – baking, going for walks – as if I could move on from what's happened recently. But, what else can I do? It helped Natsuki, it helped Kurumada… it helped me. And yet, Saiki's still…")

Mind occupied at the thought he couldn't definitively conclude, Hayasaka eventually gave into his tiresome state and went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: "Entry eleven: my team and I have already built the second mascot within a week due to the boss' demand. We decided on calling this tiny cat 'Dokuhana', or 'Hana' as a nickname. She's estimated to be the size of a newborn child and will have a diet of poisonous plants, specifically the flower Nerium Oleander. It's recommended that we don't directly touch or even attempt to smell or taste the flower petals anywhere on her head and tail. For our workers’ safety, we will all need to wear protective equipment when handling Hana. Hana will give off a sweet scent when she's happy and content which is safe for us to be around, but the smell can turn sour and toxic as an act of self defence which can trigger our heart rate to slow down when directly inhaled. Luckily for us, no one has triggered her defence mechanism… *yet* . As for the main difference between Hana and… Monotora, is that she's curious of the environment around her, she's more friendlier and enjoys human company— well, only a few of us to be honest, rather than being isolated in a room all day.

I would also need to mention that at some point Hana and ‘Tora’ will need to make contact with each other. For Hana's access to both us and Tora, I'm going to commission a worker to construct a built-in cat flap exclusively for Hana to use, and the only way for her to pass through is using an ID in her collar for access. Speaking of which, I'll have to add a tracking device for both of these robots so that they are connected to each other with the benefit of simultaneously being allowed miles away from one another. I’ll have to discuss plans on having our section of this building become more of an isolation room just like in hospitals.”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Hayasaka awoke feeling a little more refreshed than he had felt the past few days. Despite being grateful over being able to sleep again, a part of him still held onto the guilt of what had happened previously due to it.

When he entered the restaurant that morning, he was taken aback to find the scene a lot more lively than he anticipated. Natsuki, along with Mai and Latte, were weaving around the tables, handing out the cupcakes they had baked yesterday to the people arriving.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, whoever receives my cupcakes, I hope they taste alright, haha…”)

Kurumada: “Mornin’. What’s goin’ on in here? I don’t think I’ve seen Mai move this fast since rush hour at the bakery.”

Hayasaka: “They’re giving out cupcakes, I think.”

Kurumada: “Huh. Looks like I got to be the first to try one, eh? Here, lemme get some from Mai.”

As Kurumada tried to track Mai around the restaurant, Hayasaka couldn’t help but turn his attention over to Natsuki, who had cautiously approached Jesse and Bojack who were sitting by the barside.

Natsuki: “Um, would you guys like one?”

Bojack: “Sure.”

Without much warning, Bojack snatched up three cupcakes from her tray, already biting into one from the top and destroying the once intact cat.

Natsuki: “E-Eh?!”

Jesse: “Haha, save some for the rest of us, will ya?”

Bojack: “For your information I need to eat a lot for my body mass.”

Jesse rolled his eyes with a grin.

Jesse: “Uh, sure.”

Bojack: “Shut up, Todd 2 – you clearly know nothing about horses.”

Jesse shook his head playfully as he went to snag his own cupcake from the tray. Natsuki shuffled expectantly on her feet as the two ate the sweets.

Natsuki: “...S-So?”

Jesse: “Mm, s’good. I don’t think I remember the last time I had a cake with frostin’ that didn’t taste like actual cardboard.”

Bojack simply gave a thumbs up, mouth full on his second cupcake. Natsuki smugly huffed in relief. Tearing his eyes from the three, Hayasaka directed his gaze over to Brian who had just arrived at the restaurant. He noticed Hayasaka and waved, but jumped back as he was immediately bombarded by Latte.

Latte: “Good morning, Brian! Would you care for a cupcake?”

Brian: “H-Huh? Oh, um, alright.”

Brian picked up a cupcake from the tray, turning it around in his palm.

Brian: “Ha, this decoration is cute…”

Natsuki: “Don’t call it *cute* !”

Brian: “Ah! I-I’m sorry!”

Mai: “Oh, Natsuki! Why don’t you want people to call them that?”

With most eyes now on her, Natsuki shot her eyes firmly to the ground, fingers tensing around the tray she was holding.

Natsuki: “I-It’s just that… People calling my work ‘cute’ doesn’t feel genuine. It undermines the effort I put into it. I know it sounds stupid, but…”

Ena: “Oh no! I agree very much so with your words! It rings true with Moony as well: while she may be cute, she can pack quite the punch!”

Upon the comment, Moony spat out a mouthful of frosting. Hayasaka held back a chuckle, but paused as he heard two pairs of footsteps enter from behind. Turning back to the doorway, he was stunned at the sight: L, and right beside him, just a few steps behind, *Saiki* . His state was just as worrying as before, but what stuck out to Hayasaka this time was how he was wearing a pair of earphones, wire trailing down around his torso and tucked into his pocket. Saiki remained quiet, sticking close to L who was eyeing one of the cupcake trays with interest. Regardless, an influx of questions began to race through Hayasaka's mind.

Hayasaka: ("How did L manage to get Saiki out of his room so soon? Saiki hardly looked ready yesterday, and now this? Where did he get those earphones from? Is Saiki okay? What is L's plan here?")

Before Hayasaka could walk over towards them out of half-aggravation and half-curiosity, a yelp halted him dead in his tracks.

Natsuki: "E-Eep! Monotora?!"

Monotora: "Aw, c'mon – don't look so scared, will ya? I just wanted a cupcake too."

Natsuki: "N-No way! Leave me alone!"

Monotora grunted as they snatched up a cupcake from the tray despite Natsuki's protests.

Natsuki: "G-Gh!"

Monotora: "Anyway, you can chow down on your diabetic treats later, as everyone better head to the park pronto. I've got somethin' important to announce, kehehe!"

Gripping the small cupcake between their jaws, Monotora left the restaurant.

Natsuki: "I swear, if they do that one more time I'll never bake for everyone again…"

Kurumada: “We got more pressin’ issues at hand here than one stolen cupcake, y’know.”

Ena: “Yes – yet another rendezvous with the scary tiger thing!”

Brian: “Hayasaka, you don’t think it’s going to be another motive, do you…?”

Hayasaka: “T-That… I don’t know.”

Before long, everyone had gathered around at the park, where Monotora sprung out from behind the fountain. Atop the statues, they huffed, tapping their claw against one of the stone snakes’ heads.

Jesse: “What the hell’s up with you?”

Monotora: “We’re missin’ someone.”

Hayasaka: (“We are? Well, that’s a first. It can’t be Saiki, so who… *Oh* . I-It must be Yuri…”)

Mai: “Natsuki, did Yuri receive her cupcakes yesterday?”

Natsuki: “Um, y-yeah…”

???: “Oh, they were very lovely.”

Hayasaka, alongside a few others, turned to see Yuri walking into the park and stopping beside Natsuki.

Yuri: “The green-tea flavour was especially rich, but not too overbearing. That’s why I like your baking a lot. You understand balance.”

Natsuki: “T-Thanks…”

No one dared to speak up besides Natsuki, either turning away or glaring at the purple-haired girl. Even though her words were mundane, harmless even, the memories of her deranged giggles or exclaims of malicious delight from the previous trial had deterred them all. Hayasaka could almost see the Yuri he knew before standing there, but even he couldn’t shake off what he knew of her now.

Monotora: “...Now that the tardy one’s here, I can get onto the good stuff.”

Bojack: “Anytime you say something’s going to be good, it’s usually never actually good.”

Latte: “What did you call us here for?”

Monotora: “Y’see, Nesos has been watching you all very diligently. We care about what you all get up to, even when none of you are committin’ murders. And we took notice of how you all attempted to ‘get along’ with each other. But, as that ended pathetically, we came up with a great group activity which is sure to get those friendships bloomin’!”

Brian: “I-I don’t trust this very much…”

Mai: “I don’t appreciate you stealing my idea, either.”

Hayasaka: (“I don’t think that’s the most important part here, Mai…”)

Chuckling snidely, Monotora jumped behind the fountain and brought back a box full of handcuffs.

Monotora: “Everybody better come get a cuff – doesn’t matter what hand ya put in on.”

Kurumada: “Like hell we’re gonna willingly handcuff ourselves! D’ya think we’re stupid?”

Monotora: “Ya better do it, or I’ll punish each and every one of you that refuses to do so. Maybe I’ll chew right into your chest, or maybe I’ll take it slower: rippin’ off each limb until ya nothin’ but a pile of meat.”

Natsuki: “W-We get it already! Just stop saying those disgusting things!”

L: “...Do what they say. As long as we follow their instructions, none of us will be hurt.”

Begrudgingly, the group were handcuffed one by one by Monotora. When it was Hayasaka’s turn, he was sharply grabbed by the tiger, slapping the cold metal cuff on his wrist and tightened to an uncomfortable degree until he heard a click. He was then immediately let go of, rubbing his wrist where a mild sting remained.

Bojack: “...Okay, so, we’ve all been cuffed, on one hand, connecting to nothing. I’m sorry, but this is ridiculous.”

L: “Hm, *perhaps…* ”

Monotora: “Oh, these ain’t any regular cuffs. These ones have technological advances developed by Nesos themselves with laser-wire technology. Literally!”

Hayasaka: “L-Literally…?”

Monotora: “Kehe, there are invisible wires that’ll connect two cuffs together, essentially creatin’ a pair.”

Ena: “May we be permitted to choose our pairs?”

Monotora: “Gahaha, not a chance! Every pair has already been decided. It could be because we believe you need to get along better, or you’ve hardly spoken a word to the other before. Either way, we believe each match is sure to be interestin’. Let’s get this underway!”

Just then, Hayasaka noticed his handcuff extend out a visible red wire, trailing through the air until it connected across to another. Glancing up at the owner of the other handcuff, he paused.

Hayasaka: (“... *Saiki* ?”)

Saiki: “...”

As soon as it appeared, the wire vanished into thin air. Hayasaka’s gaze remained on the boy, who only spared him a glance in return. Soon, a commotion began to arise within the group, Hayasaka presuming the same occurrence happened with the others.

Jesse: “Heh. Hell yeah.”

Bojack: “...Great.”

Mai: “Oh! Looks like we’ve been paired up, Kurumada!”

Kurumada: “Heh, I s’pose this ain’t the worst outcome.”

Mai: “Although, since we’re already friends, I suppose Nesos thinks we need to get along better, hm?”

Kurumada: “Damnit.”

Hayasaka: (“I suppose they do have their ups and downs, haha…”)

Ena: “Salutations, Natsuki!”

Natsuki: “...Hmph.”

L: “...Well, won’t you look at that?”

Brian: “Ah…”

L: “You know, Brian, you remind me a little of someone from my investigation team: Matsuda.”

Brian: “Oh, really? What’s he like?”

L: “He’s rather clumsy and incompetent.”

Brian: “W-What…? I thought you were going to say something nice…”

Hayasaka: (“So then, Jesse and Bojack, Kurumada and Mai, Ena and Natsuki, and L and Brian… Wait, who’s left?”)

Latte: “...”

Yuri: “...”

The rest of the group turned to the final pair, who were simply staring at one another in silence.

Mai: “Ah, Latte… Are you alright? We could swap partners if you’d like.”

Monotora: “No swapsies allowed!”

Latte looked over, and smiled.

Latte: “Haha, don’t worry, I’ll be fine. A student could never scare me, anyway.”

Yuri: “I wasn’t intending to be frightening…”

Kurumada: “Ya should’ve looked in a mirror last trial.”

Jesse: “So, like, what’re we gonna be doin’ in these pairs then?”

Natsuki: “If we have to sleep together, then I’m opting out.”

Ena: “I assure you that I do not snore! I cannot say the same for Moony however!”

Moony: “Hey!”

Monotora: “You don’t gotta do anything with your partner, hell, you don’t even gotta stay with ‘em if ya want. Buuut, there’s a lil’ limit on how far you can be separated from them: about an island apart. So, really, you’ll always be somewhat close together.”

Brian: “Um, how would we know if we’re going too far from our partner?”

Monotora: “In such a case, ya cuff’ll start beepin’ – and that basically means ‘hey, you’re goin’ too far, dumbass!’ ‘Course, if ya were to ignore it and go any further, it’ll trigger an explosive inside the cuff, and you’ll be blown up into itty bitty bite-sized pieces!”

Brian: “W-What?!”

Hayasaka: (“There’s… There’s an *explosive* inside these handcuffs? Oh god…”)

Yuri: “T-That’s a ruthless blow…”

Monotora: “It only counts towards you, though, since it’s your fault you decided to be an idiot, not ya partner.”

Bojack: “What’s even the point of this motive then? If we don’t even have to be that close to our partners at all, then that whole explosive thing feels petty.”

Monotora: “I don’t think you’re gettin’ the gist here: for now, it looks easy, don’t it? But, once you begin to realise the irk of knownin’ that you’ll never truly be free from the other person, you’ll either be forced to get along, or *kill them* once you’ve become tired of them or the restraints.”

L: “...And I assume there’s a catch if we were to try and escape our handcuff, yes?”

Monotora: “You’re gettin’ real accustomed to the death game, ain’t ya? Kehehe. Alright, listen here: tamperin’ with the cuffs doesn’t have any penalty.”

Kurumada: “Wait, what? So ya sayin’ we *can* just take ‘em off?”

Monotora: “Not quite. If one of youse were to escape your cuff and let go of it, it’ll promptly snap back to it’s pair, kinda like a retractin’ string. Even if ya really far from your pair, the retraction is super strong. But, if the cuffs ever touch, the bombs inside both will detonate, and that person will experience a death double the impact of one explosion!”

Mai: “Oh dear!”

Natsuki: “That’s… You wouldn’t do that!”

Jesse: “Wait, so what if someone does blow up? Do we need a trial for that?”

Monotora: “Nah, this method ain’t a liable way of our murder clause as it’s part of the motive. If you tried to off someone this way, it wouldn’t be accounted for as a valid method – but people will sure hate ya guts for it! Escape is ultimately useless anyway; it’s not like you’ll ever find out how to break outta them!”

Monotora then threw the box up in the air by their teeth and caught it on their back.

Monotora: “Kehehe! Happy bondin’, everyone!”

And just like that, they were gone. Hayasaka glared down at his cuff, hesitant to move his wrist.

Hayasaka: (“I know it won’t go off, but I can’t shake the feeling that it will with one wrong move, h-haha…”)

Moony: “Heh, at least I’m free. And that’s the perk of no hands.”

Ena: “You should not wander off, Moony. It would be unfair to our friends.”

Moony: “Fine, but only because your pocket is the prime napping location.”

Mai: “Hm, at least Latte doesn’t have to stick too close to Yuri…”

L: “Actually, it would be most beneficial and easier if everyone stuck close to their pairs: that way, no one has to worry if they're too far off from them. I hope you don’t mind that, Brian.”

Brian: “I probably didn’t have much of a choice to begin with, did I?”

Bojack: “I definitely don’t have to worry. Todd 2 practically follows me around like a dog anyway.”

Jesse: “I don’t! But, y’know, if we’re gonna be like this for a while, the least we can do is hang out for real.”

Bojack: “...There better be something strong involved.”

Jesse: “I’m taking that as a yes.”

Yuri: “...Latte.”

Latte: “Huh?”

Without warning, Yuri stepped up to Latte, slipping her shoe off and removing the sole as she retrieved something underneath that glinted in the sun.

Hayasaka: (“H-Hang on… Is that…?”)

Yuri: “I’m actually a little relieved to take this out. Walking on it has definitely left my foot sore. Hah, it’s not exactly my fault, though. My school uniform doesn’t have any pockets, let alone anywhere suitable to keep it where it wouldn’t slip off my person nor protrude in some obvious way. It’s the only place I could keep it really.”

Bojack: “So you’ve been *walking* on that knife this entire time?”

Kurumada: “More importantly, what the hell are you plannin’ to do with that?”

L: “I highly doubt she’ll attempt anything, considering everyone is present.”

Natsuki: “She wouldn’t *do* anything, anyway!”

Yuri: “That is true. I realise I don’t have a use for it anymore.”

Following the cryptic explanation, she held the knife out to Latte, who only returned a look of confusion.

Yuri: “Here.”

Latte: “Excuse me…?”

Mai: “What could Latte possibly need that knife for?”

Yuri: “To put it back in the kitchen, of course.”

Ena: “Whose-it-what-now?”

Yuri: “I cleaned Retsuko’s blood off of it already, so it’s fine.”

Jesse: “Y’know, I don’t think that’s the problem here.”

Slowly, Latte took the knife from Yuri’s loose grip.

Bojack: “And you don’t have an extra one lying around in your other shoe, do you?”

Latte: “...I trust her. If you want me to put this back for you, then I will.”

Latte turned to leave for the hotel. However, as Hayasaka looked back at the group, he noticed Yuri was gone as well.

Brian: “H-Huh? Where did Yuri go…?”

L: “I’m sure she isn’t far, knowing the motive’s rules.”

Hayasaka: (“That was… odd. Why did Yuri do that? I mean, I suppose I’m not against her giving up that knife, but still…”)

Natsuki: “...J-Jeeze! You can all go back to whatever now!”

As the others awkwardly began to chat again, Hayasaka turned to Kurumada and Mai.

Hayasaka: “...So, ah, what’re you two planning to do?”

Mai: “Well, I’m only ever in the kitchen, and Kurumada’s only ever in the gym, so we’ll be fine! Hehe.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, we don’t gotta change nothin’.”

Mai: “Oh, but, perhaps Nesos is right: how about we settle our differences, hm?”

Kurumada: “What differences? And don’t agree with the company!”

Hayasaka: (“T-This is going to take a while, haha…”)

Kurumada: “So, uh, what about you and… him?”

Kurumada gestured over to Saiki, who was standing a little ways behind Hayasaka.

Hayasaka: “I’ll be alright. Saiki will most likely be quiet, anyway.” (“Although, just how close should I stick by him? I don’t want to make him uncomfortable…”)

Mai: “Hum, I’m still a little worried for Latte, though.”

Kurumada: “Just keep an eye on her if ya so damn worked up about it.”

Mai: “I suppose I’ll do just that then, hehe!”

With that, Mai skipped off.

Kurumada: “Wh–oi! Ya can’t just walk off like that already!”

Kurumada then sped off to catch up with her, Hayasaka chuckling at the two’s antics under his breath. As he watched them, he noticed L approaching with Brian in tow.

L: “Well then, Hayasaka, if you’re not busy, I’d like you to come with me to my room so we can start on our group investigation.”

Hayasaka: “ *Group* investigation?”

L: “Yes, Saiki will also be joining us, you see.”

Hayasaka: (“He is…?”)

L: “I suppose you’ll have to join as well, Brian, just because.”

Brian: “Wait, w-what’s going on?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I decided to help out L with his investigation into Nesos. He’s tried to bring it up with the group before, remember? Haha…”

Brian: “Oh, I see. Then I don’t mind joining too, actually.”

L: “Isn’t that a relief?”

As L began to lead them back to the hotel, Hayasaka spotted Saiki hadn't moved. Lightly tapping on his shoulder, he peered up at him. Hayasaka faltered for a moment, realising the boy had music in, so he simply gestured for him to follow. Saiki remained unresponsive, but must've understood what was going on as he joined the group over to L's room.

After being invited inside, Hayasaka was first greeted with a wall covered head to toe with sheets detailing bits and pieces of all sorts of information, as well as every surface littered in paper and open books. If he glanced to the side, he could also see many cups stacked on L's bedside table.

L: "Please excuse the mess. It'd all be much neater if I had access to a computer."

As Saiki went to sit down on the edge of L's bed, Brian leaned close to Hayasaka.

Brian: "Do you understand what any of this stuff means?"

Hayasaka: "I'm afraid I'm just as in the dark as you are."

Walking up to his cluttered wall, L plucked off one of the sheets.

L: “Let’s begin by going over what we already know about Nesos. They’re a company large enough to be able to host an entire death game on a set of islands on a discrete part of the world, conducting elaborate executions and the constructions of whole facilities. However, they’re also very under the radar, no one knowing of their existence outside of the letter that they sent to everyone here.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s an awful lot to consider, isn’t it?”)

L: “Speaking of said letter, what was written to you two exactly?”

Brian: “Ah, well, it was kind of just a typical formal-type letter, you know? It talked about inviting me to an interview.”

Hayasaka: “As was mine. There was nothing out of the ordinary I can recall.”

L: “Then why did you choose to partake in this interview, assuming you did not perform any background checks beforehand?”

Both Hayasaka and Brian had become quiet at the question. They looked to each other for a moment, uncertainty washed across both of their faces.

Hayasaka: “...The letter said we couldn’t disclose any information about Nesos to anyone else. I was afraid of attempting any searching in case I’d get caught.”

Brian: “Y-Yeah, erm, I’m not very techy myself, so I didn’t know how to find information, anyway…”

L neither appeared satisfied nor contempt with the answer, but nodded as he darted his eyes around the wall.

L: “...I see. Even though you had done no vetting whatsoever, you both still turned up to the interview like everyone else did. But what I want to know is why. There are a lot of natural sceptics across the group after all, such as myself and even Walter.”

Brian: “The only thing I remember the letter promising was a better life and a large salary.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, mine was similar to that as well.” (“But now, I just feel like a complete idiot for taking such an offer…”)

L: “Curious. I wonder if that was the tipping point most of us found ourselves succumbing to. Although, I doubt all of us have financial problems, so it’s unlikely it was the same reasoning for everyone.”

Brian: “Maybe we could ask around about what was in everyone’s letters?”

Hayasaka: “I’m unsure if everyone would’ve remembered what was written… Especially since we’re not all, ah, here anymore.”

Brian: “Oh yeah…”

L: “Hm… I suppose it’s an acceptable starting point in accumulating information against Nesos, mind you.”

In the midst of his sentence, L spied his eyes over towards Saiki, Hayasaka noticing his gaze with concern.

L: “...Ah, I’m rather thirsty. Brian, would you mind making everyone some tea?”

Brian: “H-Huh? Why me?”

L: “It’s simply my ‘Matsuda instinct’. You’ll be fine a few metres away from me, in any case.”

Brian: “Um… *Sigh* , I guess so. I-I’ll be right back.”

Dejected, but more so confused, Brian slipped out of the room. Idling a few seconds to make sure he was out of earshot, L gestured for Hayasaka to come over. He did so, a tense feeling making its way up his spine.

Hayasaka: “What’s wrong…?”

L: “Making Brian leave was simply a distraction so I could finally discuss with you the more pressing issue on my mind, you see.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? What could be more important than figuring out the identity of Nesos?”

L raised a finger, aiming it nonchalantly at Saiki. Hayasaka’s brow creased, exhaling a sharp breath as the frustration from before bubbled back up.

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry, but I just don’t understand this. Why have you been so interested in Saiki all this time?”

L: “I assure you this is for no ill intent whatsoever. It’s simply to do with his talent.”

Hayasaka paused, all previous anger subsided.

Hayasaka: “His… his talent?”

L: “I’m sure you remember that Saiki is the only one to have never revealed his Ultimate Talent to anyone in the group thus far, correct?”

Hayasaka: (“That…”)

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “And who are you then?”

???: “ *Kusuo Saiki.* ”

Mai: “Hello, Saiki! I’m Mai, and this is Kurumada and Hayasaka. Oh, what about your talent?”

Saiki: “...”

Kaidou: “Erm, Saiki apparently doesn’t seem to remember his talent right now. But that’s OK! We’re gonna figure it out as soon as he does!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...It was because he had apparently forgotten it. That’s what I was told.”

L: “But if he really had forgotten his talent due to stress or some sort of fear, then surely he would’ve remembered it by now, wouldn’t he?”

Hayasaka: “I… I suppose you have a point.”

L: “It leads me to believe it’s one of two things: either he’s deliberately keeping it a secret, or his memory of his talent has been erased. Regardless of which one it is, they both lead to the fact that Saiki’s talent is something dangerous, or beyond the realms of what could be considered a normal talent.”

Hayasaka: “It’s a bit out there, your theory. Perhaps Saiki really has just forgotten it, and it’s not like it’s appropriate to ask now, is it? H-Haha…”

L: “Yet I entrust you to do just that.”

Hayasaka: “W-What? No, I couldn’t do such a thing.”

L: “But as you managed to convince Saiki to come out of his room a lot quicker than I could, I believe you have a better chance of persuading him to talk.”

Hayasaka stood still for a moment, eyes flickering between L and the wall in contemplation.

Hayasaka: “...Then, how did you manage to succeed in getting Saiki to come out of his room this morning?”

L: “I had to do a bit of dirty encouragement on my end. I searched around for something that could aid me, until I found a pair of earphones in the stage bar’s storage room. I convinced Saiki that if he were to come out, he could wear them if he did not wish to listen to any outside chatter. Eventually, he took the bait, however on the downside I couldn’t get any information out of him.”

Hayasaka glanced over at Saiki, who was staring idly at a spot on the carpet.

Hayasaka: (“...I wonder if he wanted to block out any potential mention of the previous trial.”)

He felt his face strain in guilt as he curled his fists. Making eye contact with L who was staring at him expectantly for an answer, he let out a soft sigh.

Hayasaka: “...I-I suppose I could try. But, I can’t promise anything in Saiki’s current state. I-I mean, even his usual state isn’t very talkative either…”

L: “I wish you the best, Hayasaka.”

Brian: “H-Hey, I’m back.”

Attempting to nudge the door open with his foot, Brian arrived back lugging a tray of tea mugs, briefcase shoved under his arm. Hayasaka was quick to take the tray from his unsteady grasp as L picked up a mug unconcerned, as if their previous conversation hadn't happened at all.

L: "Let's get back to work, shall we?"

The four (or rather three) got back to discussing what they could of Nesos until all topics had been squeezed dry. Content for now, L allowed them to disband for the day. As Hayasaka watched Saiki walk off, he began to pace in his direction, mulling over in his head how he was to go about things. Eventually he gathered the courage to finally speak out.

Hayasaka: "Ah, Saiki?"

Saiki didn't respond, continuing to distance himself between the two. Hayasaka was left blank for a moment, until he realised it was due to the music. Hurrying his steps, he closed the gap and tapped his shoulder. Swiftly, Saiki turned around, although somewhat startled despite holding his usual cold face.

Hayasaka: "Ha, um, Saiki, could you take your ear–... *Ah, you still can't hear me, can you* ?"

Shoving down the embarrassment dwelling upon the conversation already, Hayasaka gestured towards his own ears. After a moment, Saiki pulled an earbud out. Now exposed, Hayasaka could faintly hear what Saiki had been listening to: the only way he could describe it was loud and scratchy. He decided not to question it further.

Hayasaka: "I'm sorry for disturbing you, Saiki, but I was just thinking… S-Since we're going to be chained to each other for a while, I could at least attempt to accompany you, right?"

Saiki: "..."

Rubbing his wrist at the lack of response, Hayasaka racked his mind on what to do next. He scrambled through thought after thought, until he remembered something.

Hayasaka: “Y-You haven’t been to the new island yet, have you? Would you like to come take a tour with me, perhaps?”

The proposal lingered in the air for a while until Saiki returned a nod. Hayasaka let out a heavy sigh of relief in his head.

Unfortunately for him, the one sided conversation had only just begun.

At first, Hayasaka led Saiki around the clock tower and docks, muttering brief information about each place as Saiki observed idly. While at the docks, an idea sparked in Hayasaka, chuckling quietly to cue in.

Hayasaka: “Haha, you know, the first time we investigated here, Kurumada complained about craving for sushi. I-I mean, isn’t that silly? Ah, what about you? Do you have a favourite sushi?”

Either Saiki had ignored him, or was too preoccupied staring out into the waves lapping against the pier.

Hayasaka: (“A-Ah dear… I know he must’ve turned down his music earlier, so this is a little…”)

Shaking it off for now, Hayasaka guided Saiki towards the shop district, mentioning the boarded up buildings as they wandered by. It was then when Hayasaka began to pick up on a small commotion emitting from the woodworking shop, and so switched his initial route to go investigate. The door was open, and inside the two caught sight of Jesse and Bojack at a workshop table, the former of which instructing the other on how to properly saw a plank of wood. A couple of beer bottles were also present, littering the tabletop. Noticing their arrival, Jesse glanced up from his work and waved.

Jesse: “Yo, Mr. Hayasaka. And, oh, uh, Saiki…”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “H-Hello. Um, what’re you two doing?”

Jesse: “I’m teachin’ Bojack over here how craft a wooden box. Startin’ simple, y’know?”

Bojack: “Simple? I think I’ve been sawing into the same piece of wood for the better part of ten minutes. Thank god I became an actor.”

Jesse: “I think you’re just an easy quitter.”

Bojack: “Jokes on you, I take pride in quitting things easily. A bad newspaper subscription, a shitty relationship. And more things. Just so you know.”

Jesse: “So I take it you’re jumpin’ ship on this too?”

Bojack: “No. I just need a break right now.”

With that, Bojack sat down on a nearby wooden chair, picking up a beer bottle.

Jesse: “But we literally just started!”

Bojack: “I’ll finish it… at some point. How about you just do the hard parts for me?”

Jesse chuckled, leaning back against the workshop table.

Hayasaka: (“It’s surprising to see Jesse so happy again. I don’t think he’s ever been like this since before Walter died. Perhaps all he really wanted was to spend some time with Bojack…”) “Ah, we should probably leave you to it, then.”

Jesse: “Sure. You’re free to swing by anytime yourself for some tips, if you want.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’ll think about it, haha…”

After a passing goodbye, Hayasaka and Saiki made their way south towards the shrine. A serene feeling enveloped him as he took in the view once again, but the apathetic boy standing a few ways over in the corner of his eye left his nerves on end once again.

Hayasaka: (“I don’t believe Saiki’s spoken a single word throughout this tour. If anything, he just looks… bored. He hardly even looks comfortable, and I don’t think it’s due to the island’s vibe…”)

Observing Saiki once more, he cleared his throat as he hoped for the best with whatever fell out of his mouth next.

Hayasaka: “...Ah, this shrine is much nicer than the one back at home. It’s a bit, how do I put this… gaudy? I-I’m not sure how to describe it perfectly, but it’s certainly out there. I take it you have a shrine where you live as well?”

Saiki’s gaze remained fixed on the shrine. Although, to Hayasaka’s surprise, he nodded. Despite how vapid and small the gesture was, Hayasaka was relieved to have received anything at all.

Hayasaka: “In that case, I suppose your parents are the type to drag you there to pray for the new year, huh? Haha… Is it rural? Where you live, I mean.”

Saiki shook his head.

Hayasaka: “...Then urban?”

Saiki nodded.

Hayasaka: “Ah, then I bet your local shrine must be prettier than the one here. You must be used to the fast-paced world like I am, so being on an island of all places is certainly a cultural shock for the both of us, haha…”

Hayasaka's laugh attempting to ease the air only backfired as Saiki, like all previous times before, reciprocated nothing. Realising he was holding his breath for nothing, Hayasaka sighed, shoulders slumping slightly.

Hayasaka: "Saiki, I'm sorry for trying to engage you in all of these ridiculous conversations. You clearly don't wish to talk. I'm unsure why I even bothered: small talk isn't my strong suit, and I especially can't hold a conversation by myself… I-I'll just shut up now."

Saiki: "*... I don't mind* ."

Hayasaka's eyes widened as he shot a look towards Saiki.

Hayasaka: ("He… he talked?") "...Y-You don't mind if I speak?"

Saiki: " *You're not being annoying, nor are you trying to pry at me for anything. I'm fine if you just want to talk to me about things* ."

From hearing those words alone, a smile tugged at Hayasaka's lips as he nodded.

Hayasaka: "I see… Ah, but, I'd rather look at the shrine for a while, if that's alright with you."

The silence from Saiki indicated that he had no preference either way. And so they remained there for a while, basking in the midday glow of the sun as Hayasaka reflected on this and that. Once the tour had concluded, Hayasaka offered to walk Saiki back to the first island. As they were strolling through the second island, however, stifled sobs rang into Hayasaka's ears as he caught someone fleeing the library in tears.

Hayasaka: "Ah, N-Natsuki…!"

Natsuki abruptly curbed on her toes before she knocked into the two with her blurry vision. Her eyes were glued to the ground, but she didn't dare to move either.

Hayasaka: “W-What’s wrong…?”

Wiping away her tears with her sleeve, she huffed in frustration,

Natsuki: “I-It’s nothing, alright? I just… I was just trying to talk to Yuri.”

Hayasaka: “Yuri? About what?”

Natsuki: “Everything, I guess. I tried to talk her out of her state, I tried to convince her to stop thinking her horrible beliefs and return to the group, but… Yuri insisted she was right. She even said she didn’t mind dying herself to prove so. How could she even say something like that? So I just – I don’t know – I got so mad I just up and left…”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki’s trying really hard to help Yuri, despite what she’s done… I would argue she shouldn’t be doing this in the first place, but, wouldn’t I just do the same with Kurumada and Mai?”)

???: “Natsuki!”

Natsuki: “H-Huh?”

Turning his head to the direction of the new voice, Hayasaka spotted Ena frantically waving their arms and dashing towards them.

Ena: “Thank Runas I have found you! You cannot run off like that when we are tied with a deadly limit apart – you could have endangered yourself to an explosive fate!”

Natsuki: “Oh… I’m sorry for running off like that. It’s just–ugh, I can’t help but let my emotions get the best of me! I wish they didn’t get in the way so often!”

Ena: “You should not be ashamed of your emotions. We all possess them after all!”

Natsuki: “But a lot of things would’ve never happened in the first place if we didn’t: Hiroshi’s urgency to save his friends, Kaidou’s responsibility to help the group… If they didn’t feel those things then they would still be here now! Hell, you have it worst with your emotional outbursts, don’t you?”

Moony: “The little pink girl has a point.”

Ena’s face remained blank for a moment, before taking one of Natsuki’s hands.

Ena: “Although my triggers are much lighter than most of you, my most top priority is to keep myself in check so as to not harm my friends, and more importantly myself! We are stronger than our feelings.”

Natsuki: “...I don’t feel very strong.”

Ena: “Do not worry! It is also very much okay to let out those emotions from time to time, contrary to what our thoughts may say. And I am sure if Yuri is a true friend, she will take these feelings to her heart.”

Natsuki’s eyes drifted to the ground, reflecting on Ena’s words.

Natsuki: “...Thank you, Ena.”

Ena: “Oh, it is no problem at all! I am no good at speeches, you see.”

Hayasaka: (“That was very surprising coming from Ena… Although, I suppose they haven’t had a major outburst since the first case, have they? Perhaps they have been trying to keep themselves under check all this time…”)

Moony: “Yeah, enough of the sappy stuff. Wanna go back to the hotel and eat the rest of the cupcakes? Those things sure can fill a mouth.”

Ena: “You are not just saying that to have more cupcakes, are you Moony?”

Moony: “ *Whaaat* ? Psh, no.”

Ena: “Oh, then I without a doubt believe you!”

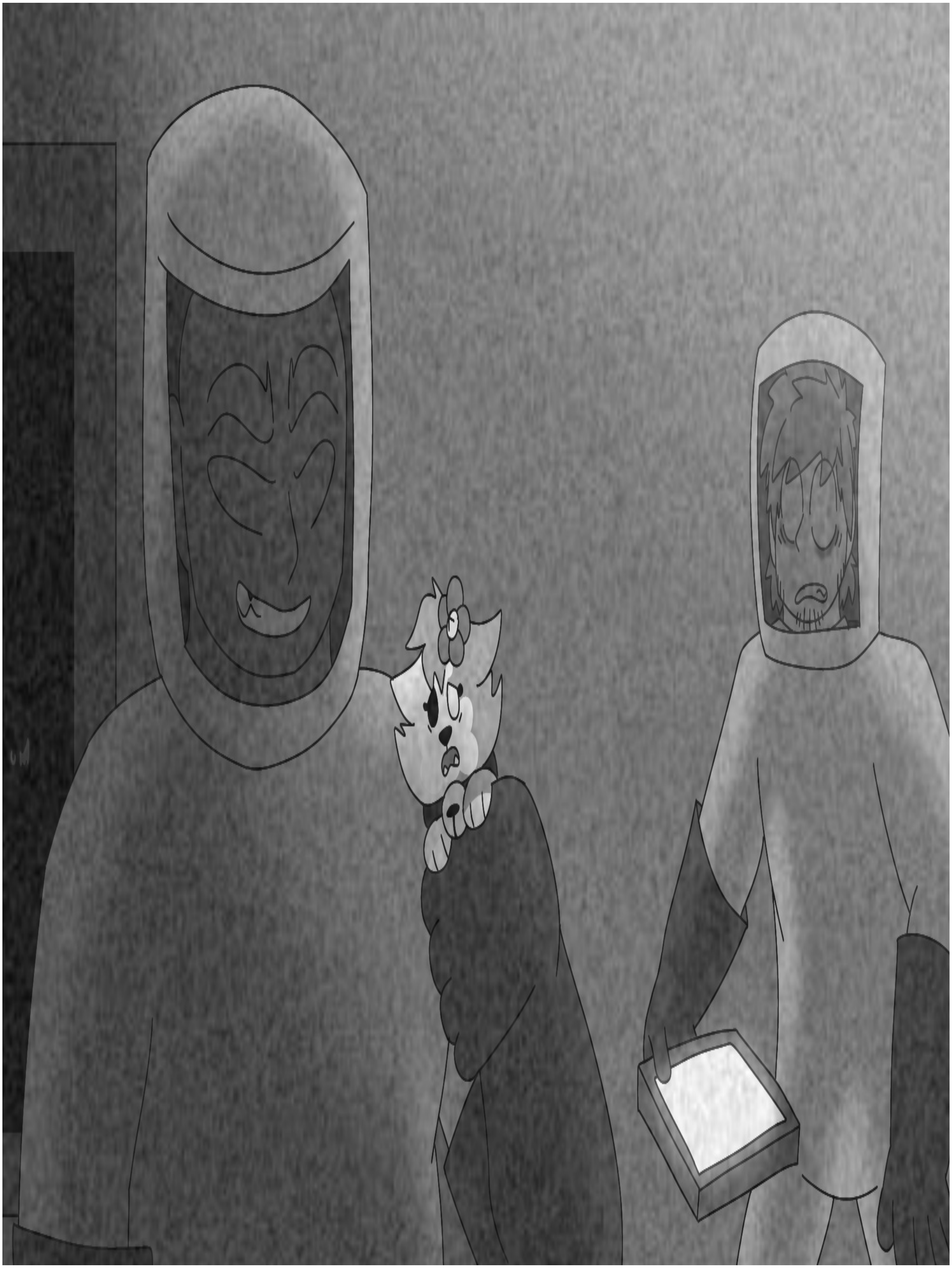
Natsuki giggled at the two’s antics, tears subsided. She and Ena, alongside Moony, parted from the others and headed for the hotel. Turning to Saiki and seeing he looked just about ready to turn in for the day, Hayasaka let him go as well (as far as they could from each other, that was).

Some time later, the nighttime announcement played, notioning for Hayasaka to return to his room. Slipping into his bed, he stared down at his handcuff.

Hayasaka: ("I wonder how comfortable it'll be to sleep in this? Well, it's not like I have a choice. Speaking of which, I can't stop thinking about how Saiki spoke to me today. I don't think he has since Kaidou… Ah, well, I still have a lot to learn about him. Even if L wants me to get close to him solely for his talent, I feel like there's more Saiki is keeping secret than just that…")

Finding a comfortable position that hopefully wouldn't leave a graze on his wrist in the morning, Hayasaka went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???#1: “Before we take you in to see the mascots, we’ll have to show you them one at a time since they haven’t made contact with each other yet—”

???#2: “Yes, yes, I’m aware one has poisonous flowers and the other doesn’t listen to me. Don’t you think I already know this about my own robots?”

???#1: '*... Well, I wouldn’t say that...* '

???#2: “Hey sweetheart~ Never seen someone so pretty looking after my mascots~”

???#3: “E-Excuse me?”

???#2: “Anyways, where's the big cat? Oh! They're they are! Jesus, they're not doing anything. Aren't they supposed to be destroying things or something instead of being left to wander around their empty room?"

???#1: "We uh… haven’t thought about sending Tora out to hunt for themselves yet, not until we've introduced Hana to them…"

???#2: “Hm, I see...”

???#1: ‘ *Is he... smiling? I can’t help but notice that the smile he has on his face looks... Off—?’*

???#2: "Oh, is that the flower cat? Let me hold her!"

???#1: "Wait, stop! She’s not fond of other people touching her—"

Dokuhana: *Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!*

???#2: "You only squeak? Well isn't that pathetic, eh? Whatever, I'll put her down to stop your whining."

???#1: "Y-You can't just come in here to recklessly put your life at risk with these robots!"

???#2: “Relax! It’s fine when I do things around here. And besides, the robots won’t even attack me."

???#1: “B-But you can’t tamper with them like it’s child play! You could’ve triggered Hana to release her toxic fumes that may have put your life in danger! Who knows what might happen if you were to treat Tora like that! They could’ve bitten you and we don’t know what will happen when their—”

???#2: “Hm… Well if you don’t know what their bite is like, then why haven’t you tested that yet?”

???#1: “W-What? That’s not the point right now—”

???#2: “Oh shut it, I’ve spent enough time here wearing these thick rubbery suits. I ought to get onto what I came here to say now.”

???#1: *Sigh*

???#2: “I’m offering to build a cage larger than the room Monotora lives in right now! Built with every single environment they’ll have to adapt to be able to do its job, y’know? A habitat of sorts so that it can act like a *real* cat— or whatever it's also based off of. I just want to see what its hidden weapon can do to prey when they have to hunt for themselves!”

???#1: “B-But do we even have the time to get it done—”

???#2: “Brilliant! I’ll go call for some builders to start building this little jungle gym of theirs right now! We’ll go ahead and discuss it more with the other workers later, yes? Now, get back to work.”

SHUT

Dokuhana: Squeak! Squeak!

???#1: “...Shit…”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Drowsy, but more so solemn, Hayasaka awoke and went to prepare himself for the day. He spent an extra minute or two soothing the obvious red mark that ate into his wrist, the mild sting pestering as the cuff rubbed against his skin every so often. Ignoring it to the best of his ability, he stepped outside his room. Coincidentally, the creak of another door emitted beside his own, and he turned to watch Saiki emerge from out of his room. Their eyes met, and after a longer than comfortable moment of silence, Hayasaka awkwardly fumbled as he cleared his throat.

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, g-good morning, Saiki.”

Saiki nodded in return.

Hayasaka: “You left your room of your own free will…”

It was an obvious comment, but Hayasaka was lost for anything else he could say. Saiki let his finger drag down the cord of his earphones until he looked back at Hayasaka.

Saiki: “*... I wanted to get breakfast* .”

Hayasaka: (“Is that really the reason? Regardless, it’s good to see him come out of his room again at all.”) “Then, how about I walk you down to the restaurant?”

Saiki all but shrugged. Hayasaka took it as an ‘I suppose so’. At the restaurant, Hayasaka attempted to sit beside Saiki at a table to wait for everyone to arrive, and to his surprise, the other didn’t protest. Pondering to himself, Hayasaka let his eyes scan around the restaurant before he picked up on an interesting conversation near the barside.

Jesse: “So you really got the role just like that? ‘Cuz your manager forged your signature on the contract over the ‘execs wantin’ you to be the lead?”

Bojack: “I mean, sure, I wasn’t interested in the show at first. But I mean if everyone wanted me to do it, who was I to say no?”

Jesse: “Hell, sounds like you're in demand.”

Bojack: “Well I’m not actually ‘in demand’. But people love me really.”

Jesse: “Oh! Yo, you should totally do an act in the stage bar for everyone!”

Bojack: “Yeah, no. Hard no. I’m not saying I won’t do a monologue, but I’d rather just stick on an episode of Horsin’ Around for my most-known role.”

Jesse: “Aw, c’mon, don’t be shy.”

Jesse playfully nudged Bojack, who returned a grimace.

Bojack: “I’m not *shy* , I’m just, uh… unsure of the less-westerny majority.”

Jesse: “Oh, uh, I get you. Damnit, uh… Well, I still wanna see you up on that stage, so is there anythin’ else your up for?”

Bojack: “Let’s see… I used to do stand-up at the roots of my career. Yeah, it was just me and Herb, trying to break even in a bar in downtown L.A. It wasn’t my best years, of course.”

Jesse: “But I bet you're still pretty sharp at it, right?”

Bojack: “I don’t know, Todd 2, it’s been a few years since I’ve touched it.”

Jesse: “C’mon, man! Comedy is like *the* universal experience! And, I mean, wouldn’t it be nice to cheer up the group a lil’?”

Bojack: “...Eh, why the hell not? I’ll finally have something I can show off while being allowed to get somewhat drunk.”

Jesse: “Sweet! I can be your show host – y’know, invite you onstage by mic n’ everything.”

Natsuki: “Hey, are you… are you actually going through with this?”

Mildly startled by the new voice speaking up, both Jesse and Bojack turned to the girl apprehensively approaching them.

Jesse: “Well, yeah, I’d like to.”

Natsuki: “Then, um, can I perform a poem during the event too? Maybe just before the stand-up, like a pre-show thing.”

Bojack: “Uh, I don’t know about that. A poem leading up to a stand-up gig is a little tone-deaf in my book.”

Natsuki: “I-I can bake more cupcakes for the event as well if you’d like.”

Bojack: “Well in that case, why didn’t you say so before? Just make sure there’s a batch dedicated to the main star.”

Jesse shot a confused glance in Bojack's direction at the sudden change in attitude, before shaking his head with a grin.

Jesse: "Aw man, this is gonna be the bomb, yo. We should 'prolly head over to the stage bar later to set up."

As the conversation steered into the logistics of the event, Hayasaka turned back to Saiki, who had been tuning in as well.

Hayasaka: "What do you think about the idea, Saiki?"

Saiki shrugged.

Hayasaka: "Ah, w-well… Oh, you haven't tried Natsuki's baking yet, have you? At least you'll get an opportunity now, huh? Haha… Do you have any sweets you like in particular, Saiki?"

Saiki: "... *Coffee jelly* ."

Hayasaka: ("Coffee jelly? I can't say I've tried it before, but I do remember seeing it around. Perhaps I'll have to see what the hype is about.")

Before long, Hayasaka spotted Kurumada arrive at the restaurant, strolling over to where he was sitting.

Kurumada: "G'mornin'."

He then leaned over the table with a teasing look.

Kurumada: "Gotta say, you're pretty good at attractin' the people with glasses. Is that a natural thing?"

Hayasaka: “H-Haha… I suppose it’s just a coincidence. What’s gotten you so eager then?”

Kurumada: “Eh, well… Since our last lil’ ‘sesh was interrupted by Monotora, I wanted to see if you’d like to do somethin’ else?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, really? What did you have in mind?”

Kurumada: “I was thinkin’, since Monotora can’t get to us from inside somewhere unless it was somethin’ important – which I doubt’ll happen anyway – what about the cafe on the second island?”

Hayasaka: “That’s a good idea actually, haha…”

Kurumada: “Great. How about we meet there at noon?”

Hayasaka’s growing smile faltered, eyes making their way over to look at Saiki who was currently immersed in his music. Kurumada followed his sight, and cocked a brow.

Kurumada: “What’s wrong?”

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry, it’s just that… I-I’d rather continue following L’s rule of sticking close to my partner. I don’t necessarily want to leave Saiki alone.”

Kurumada: “Aw, c’mon, he’ll be fine on his own. He ain’t a kid.”

Hayasaka: “T-That’s not the point I was trying to make…”

He then leaned towards Kurumada, voice toning down to a light whisper.

Hayasaka: “I’m worried for Saiki’s wellbeing. He’s clearly been dragged back into the group earlier than what can be deemed acceptable time to grieve properly for Kaidou. Ever since we’ve been paired together, I suppose I’ve felt a responsibility to make sure he’s alright.”

Kurumada flicked his eyes between Hayasaka and Saiki for a moment, before softening his expression.

Kurumada: “I get where you’re comin’ from. But, ya shouldn’t shoulder anythin’ too harsh just ‘cuz you feel obliged to.”

Hayasaka nodded, melancholy eyes trailing back to Saiki. As he noticed him twiddling his earphones between his fingers, an idea struck in his mind.

Hayasaka: “Ah, w-what if… What if Saiki occupied himself with his music a few tables away from us in the cafe? That way, he’ll still be closeby without being directly involved with us.” (“And I’d doubt Saiki would want to join us anyway, haha…”)

Kurumada: “...As long as he’s outta earshot, then I’m fine with that.”

Kurumada flashed an assuring smile over the idea, and Hayasaka felt relief over the compromise. A little while after breakfast, Hayasaka found himself stuck with some free time before noon.

Hayasaka: “Saiki, I’m just going to go for a walk. I-I’ll be nearby if you need me.”

Saiki nodded, and the two began to part ways.

Hayasaka: (“Hum, I suppose I should go find someone to talk to, to pass the time.”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Natsuki in the library.

Natsuki: “Hmph, it’s too hot, but I don’t know if I wanna take off my blazer if there’s any perverts around…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Natsuki. Would you like to talk for a little while?”

Natsuki: “Eh, Hayasaka? I mean, if you want… N-Not to say I hate you or anything!”

Hayasaka spent some time with Natsuki. Unsure what she would like, he gifted her a set of cutesy cookie cutters.

Natsuki: “Oh…”

Hayasaka: “D-Do you not like it?”

Natsuki: “N-No, I do! It’s just… I don’t know! I didn’t think you were gonna give me a present. So… t-thanks…”

Hayasaka: (“Well, I think she liked it…?”)

Natsuki: “So, why did you want to hang out with me, anyway? Since you’re an adult, it feels a little creepy on my end…”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, I’m sorry, I didn’t see it like that. I assure you that I have no ill intent, haha. I just wanted to talk a little, a-as I’ve been trying to do with everyone else.”

Natsuki: “ *Trying* ?”

Hayasaka: “...I suppose I just want to get along with people? I don’t want anyone to see me as their enemy, haha…”

Natsuki: “Oh, I guess that’s not a bad thing, at all… S-So I guess I can allow us to talk.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, so… Natsuki, how did you get your talent as the Ultimate Cake Decorator, then?”

Natsuki: “Hmph, I really should’ve been the Ultimate Baker, but Mai stole my talent!”

Hayasaka: (“I-I’m not so sure if Mai exactly *stole* her talent… I mean, it was Nesos who gave everyone their ultimate titles anyhow.”)

Natsuki: “But, to answer your question, I guess I just bake from time to time, y’know? Mostly for my friends and the literature club – like cupcakes and stuff.”

Hayasaka: “I see. That’s very nice of you.”

Natsuki: “T-Thanks…”

Hayasaka: (“Did I fluster her…? Perhaps she’s not good with compliments. God knows I’m not, haha…”) “So, what got you into baking, exactly? Usually at your age, it’s hard to get into hobbies with all your studies.”

Natsuki: “I… W-Well I just… I was inspired by… my m-manga…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, your… manga?”

Natsuki: “Jeeze, if you’re going to judge, you can go ahead and do it on the other side of the island.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not judging you! What part of that was even judging…?”

Natsuki: “...Look, there’s just this manga called ‘Parfait Girls’, and while it’s not part of the main plot, there’s a bunch of baking-related chapters, alright? So, I mean, it’s a little hard *not* to be persuaded, y’know?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose you have a point? Haha… Then, what is the actual plot about?”

Natsuki: “Huh? Uh… I don’t know if I wanna tell you – you’re just gonna make fun of me.”

Hayasaka: “Of course not, Natsuki. A lot of teens your age read manga, r-right? I even know a girl around your age who reads manga. There’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Natsuki: “...I guess you’re right.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder what made her act so defensive in the first place?”)

Natsuki: “If you really, really wanna know about the manga, then I guess you can come back another time. I don’t want anyone to see us hanging out for so long and think something weird is going on…”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Um, I’ll have to see, haha…”

As time crept closer to noon, Hayasaka went to scout around for Saiki, who he found already engrossed in a book alongside his music. Gesturing him to follow, they made their way to the cafe. The bell rang with a small jingle as they stepped inside, Hayasaka spotting Kurumada leant back in one of the many seats and two coffees planted on the table. He waved for him to come sit as Saiki walked past and found a table on the opposite side of the cafe to continue reading alone. As he picked up the coffee mug, Hayasaka’s brow creased at the strange pattern atop the foam.

Kurumada: “Uh, just ignore that. Was tryn’a make some latte art before you came, but it ended up bein’ a total waste of time. Turns out I ain’t very sturdy with intricate things.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, haha, don’t worry. It’s charming…”

Kurumada: “Really now? Heh, I’ll keep that in mind then. So, I saw ya walk off with some of the other guys yesterday. What’d the nerd squad get up to, eh?”

Hayasaka: (“Nerd squad? Do we really look that way together…?”) “W-We’re actually conducting an investigation into Nesos. Well, what we can on limited information, anyhow.”

Hayasaka noticed Kurumada’s face draw to a blank.

Kurumada: “Oh. I didn’t think you were doin’ something so important. Shouldn’t the whole group be in on something like that?”

Hayasaka: “L had proposed it many times to the group before, but no one had taken up the offer, remember? Regardless, we haven’t gotten very far; the only thing we’ve really discussed is how we should look into the letters everyone was sent inviting them to the interview.”

Kurumada: “Fair enough. Well, if ya need any outside support, I’m here to help.”

Hayasaka: “Thank you. Ah, so, what’ve gotten up to with Mai? She did insist you two needed to ‘get along better’, haha…”

Kurumada: “To be honest, not much. We’ve mostly kinda been doin’ our own thing.”

Hayasaka: “Really? Surely, this is an excuse to hang out a little more, don’t you think?”

Kurumada: “I mean, alright, we have. But, all me n’ Mai ever do is tease each other.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? About what?”

Kurumada: “Y’know, this n’ that. Our jobs, friends, love life…”

Hayasaka: “ *L-Love life* ?”

Kurumada practically choked mid-sip on his coffee.

Kurumada: “That–That is, uh, *cough* , I just meant Mai likes to pry on who I’m ‘into’ n’ all that. You know her and her damn obsession with romance.”

Hayasaka: (“Yes, that is quite like her, isn’t it? She even teased me in a similar manner while we were baking a few days ago.”) “A-And is there anyone you’re ‘into’? Haha.”

Kurumada: “Heh… Who’d you think?”

Hayasaka’s eyes widened, and Kurumada immediately mirrored his look as he waved his hand.

Kurumada: “I didn’t–uh, didn’t mean to say that.”

???: “Say what?”

The high-pitched, sugar coated voice snapped the two’s attention to the cafe’s entrance where they saw Mai saunter inside with Latte beside her. Hayasaka overheard Kurumada groan slightly.

Kurumada: “ *Speak of the devil* … It’s nothin’. What’re you two doing here, anyway?”

Latte: “Hehe, it’s a coincidence meeting you here, actually. Me and Mai happen to come here often.”

Mai: “Ah, cheer up, Kurumada. Don’t think the cafe’s your personal property only~.”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada can find a way to escape Monotora, but perhaps not Mai, huh?”)

Kurumada: “I ain’t. You two can do whatever ya want.”

Mai: “Then in that case, how about we join you?”

Latte: “Oh, that sounds like a great idea!”

After making themselves a drink, Mai and Latte pulled up a chair each as Hayasaka scooted his own chair over to make space for the extra guests at the unorthodox table.

Kurumada: “Ain’t this a lil’ roomy?”

Mai: “I find it more personal. No little table can stop us!”

Latte: “Ah, speaking of which, I noticed Saiki over there when we walked in. Is he here because of you, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Please don’t think I forced him here or anything, haha. I just wanted to keep an eye on him, that's all.”

Latte: “Aww, you’re so sweet for looking out for a young person like that! Do you have kids of your own?”

Hayasaka: “N-No? Um, why do you ask?”

Latte: “I have a friend who’s a dad, and I just feel like your natural instincts are similar in that way.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m hardly doing anything fatherly-like here. The fact that it’s Saiki is just a coincidence…”

Mai: “You say that, Hayasaka, but what about Gin? You practically act like he’s your own son, hehe.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, he’d do anythin’ for that kid, haha.”

Hayasaka could feel his cheeks heat up at the playful comments from his friends, self-consciously pushing his bangs out of his eyes in an attempt to conceal his embarrassed complexion.

Hayasaka: “H-Haha, I suppose so… W-What about you, Latte? Since you’ve been paired with Yuri and all…”

Latte: “Well… I have *tried* to talk to her a few times, but it was very awkward. I know what she did was horrible, but I can’t find it in my heart to believe this is really how she feels deep down. I wish I knew what to do: both she and Saiki are mentally unwell and only you’ve done something on your part to help.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, it’s alright, Latte. Yuri… she’s more unpredictable. Even Natsuki has been having trouble getting through to her, and she’s her best friend.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, we don’t blame ya.”

Latte: “I see. I do wish to try harder, however.”

Mai: “Don’t try to push yourself too hard, okay? Ah, look at us, talking about all these depressing things. How about we move onto something lighter, hm? Latte, tell us more about your favourite places on Earthbread – they all sound so interesting.”

Latte: “I’m happy you brought that up, Mai. We were just talking about Parfedia before we came here, haha…”

Hayasaka felt the air brighten as the four continued their chat together. After an hour or so, they agreed to wrap up to prepare for the stand-up event later on that evening. Before Hayasaka could retrieve Saiki from the other side of the cafe, he felt a calloused hand rest upon his shoulder.

Kurumada: “Hey, sorry our time was interrupted again. But hey, at least ya know me n’ Mai are actually hangin’ out, huh?”

Hayasaka: “It’s alright, Kurumada. We’ll have more opportunities in the future, won’t we?”

Hayasaka mustered a soft smile, and Kurumada returned the gesture with a nod. As he watched the other leave the cafe, he approached Saiki to let him know he was free to leave and that he’d be closeby.

Hayasaka: (“I still have some time before evening, so why don’t I chat with someone else…?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Saiki nearby.

Saiki: “ *This book I picked up… the plot is all over the place* .”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Saiki. I’ve come to talk with you again, i-if you don’t mind…”

Saiki: “ *...Alright* .”

Agreeing to go to his hotel room, Hayasaka spent some time with Saiki. Still very unsure on what to give him, Hayasaka gifted him a crappy video game set.

Saiki: “…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, perhaps you could boot it up in your hotel room when you’re feeling bored…?”

Saiki: “ *I guess it’s one thing to pass the time* .”

Hayasaka: (“Not a smile, but he sounds like he accepted it?”)

Saiki: “…”

Hayasaka: “So, Saiki… Do you mind if I ask about your friends this time?” (“Again, as I have genuinely no idea what else I could ask him…”)

Saiki: " *I don't have friends, just people who have unfortunately enjoyed my company enough to walk to school with me and crowd around my desk , even if I literally don't talk back half of the time* ."

Hayasaka: "Um…? Do you… care to tell me about them, at least?"

Saiki: " *I guess… There's Nendou, who's this giant idiot who'll believe anything he's told, not to mention his strange infatuation with going out for ramen every day after school.* "

Hayasaka: "But he's kind, right?"

Saiki: "*He's too stupid to be bad, even if he comes off as a delinquent sometimes due to his… odd appearance*."

Hayasaka: "O-Oh, I see…?"

Saiki: " *Terushashi's another person who won't leave me alone. She's dubbed as the 'perfect pretty girl': pretty on the outside and within. Sure, she is pretty, but it's obvious she's pushing her persona a little too artificially. Well, it's not like any of the guys care. She even has a whole fanclub dedicated to her* ."

Hayasaka: "Oh my…" ("Not a fan yourself, huh?")

Saiki: *"There's also Kuboyasu. He's a former delinquent who tries to be a model student. But he hasn't quite let go of his past and shows his true colours more often than not.* "

Hayasaka: ("Hm… he reminds me a little of Kurumada, haha.") "A-Anyone else?"

Saiki: " *Sigh… Toritsuka. He's a sp… He's just a giant pervert. I'm not sure why I even mentioned him."*

Hayasaka: "A-A pervert?"

Saiki: " *Don't worry. He tries to impress girls, but he does a horrible job at it. At least I don't have to intervene all that much* ."

Hayasaka: ("His friends *do* sound like quite a lot of work. I can sort of see why he'd want to avoid them now…") "Ah, but it's good that you do have friends. I mean if you didn't, you'd be sitting alone, o-or even bullied, haha…"

Saiki: " *...I guess* ."

Hayasaka: ("Hum, n-not the nicest thing to say to a teen, is that? Jeeze, well, I can see Saiki's tired of talking, so I suppose I'll leave him be for now.")

The two withdrew from each other after a while. Hours passed as the sky desaturated into a mellow purple, and Hayasaka decided it would be best to regroup with Saiki before heading towards the stage bar. Idling outside the entrance was Kurumada, who promptly jogged up to them.

Kurumada: "There you are."

Hayasaka: "We're not early, are we?"

Kurumada: "Nah. I've just been waitin' out here for you so we could go in together. No idea what's goin' on, but since we've all been invited we might as well make the most of it."

Hayasaka nodded and the two walked inside, Saiki tailing behind. As Hayasaka scanned around the venue, he picked up on the dimmer atmosphere, coupled with the low purple and magenta lights that aimed down onto the stage on the far end of the seating area. Faint music could be heard emitting from the stage's speakers alongside the chatter from the few preoccupied tables. He hummed under his breath, impressed at how the once sleazy-use of the stage bar before had been transformed into a more welcoming show stage.

Not long after stepping inside, they were approached by Jesse, who Hayasaka assumed appeared a little clammy from the mix of the harsh lights and whatever preparations he'd previously been making to the stage bar.

Jesse: "'Sup, guys. Good to see you here. So, what's the deal? You here as a couple? Haha."

Kurumada: " *Shut it* ."

Jesse: "Hey, hey, sorry, yo. I meant no harm. You can go ahead n' take a seat – we're still makin' some last minute 'preps."

Jesse stuck his thumb up and promptly sped off somewhere else. Brushing off the strange interaction, Hayasaka noticed one of the tables was occupied by L and Brian, the latter of which giving him a benign wave.

Brian: "Hayasaka! Come sit with us."

Kurumada ignored the invitation, taking Hayasaka's wrist and leading him to another table. Although Brian's face dropped in dejection for a moment, Saiki quietly made his way to their table and sat down beside him, which eased his face a little in contentment. Surveying the scene past their table, he accounted for Mai and Latte at one table, and Ena and Moony at another. Natsuki was also present, passing out cupcakes to any sweet-toothed patrons.

Hayasaka: ("...No sign of Yuri then. I wonder if anyone tried to invite her, or she simply decided to refuse?")

Ears pricking up at a conversation at the bar, Hayasaka directed his attention towards a certain horse swirling a beer bottle in his hand.

Bojack: "God, do I have to do this?"

Jesse: "What's wrong now? Is it about the A/C again?"

Bojack: "No–well–yeah, the A/C in here's shit but that's not what I meant. I'm just… I'm having second thoughts about this now. What if my material's out of touch with the younger audience?"

Jesse: “Y’mean the teens?”

Bojack: “No, I mean the adults, Todd 2. The *young adults* . You know, as I’m clearly way older than any of you for some reason.”

Jesse: “Jesus, you’ll be fine, man. You got this. Look, I’m gonna go grab Natsuki for her openin’ act, alright?”

Jesse kicked off his bar stool as Hayasaka turned to Kurumada.

Hayasaka: “Are you excited…?”

Kurumada: “Eh. I’m not sure how funny a horse’s gonna be.”

Hayasaka: “You could at least be a little more open minded…”

Soon, the lights dimmed, prompting the fizzle of any previous conversation. Jesse hopped onto the stage, grabbing the microphone fixed to a stand set up in the middle.

Jesse: “Yo, yo, yo! Thank you for comin’, everyone! Hope you’ve been keepin’ yourselves appetised with our premium confectionery. We got a real good line-up here tonight on Island Nesos – or as I like to call it, Island Island. First up, we’ve got the baker herself, duo-talented in both the craft of food *and* poetry: give it up for Natsuki!”

The group clapped in anticipation as Natsuki shuffled onto the stage, hands clutching a piece of paper so tightly that Hayasaka was afraid it would rip. As she arrived up to the mic, Jesse quickly fiddled with the stand, adjusting it down to her height.

Natsuki: “Y-You should’ve done this beforehand…”

Jesse: “Sorry ‘bout that: Bojack was doin’ a last minute practise just earlier, haha.”

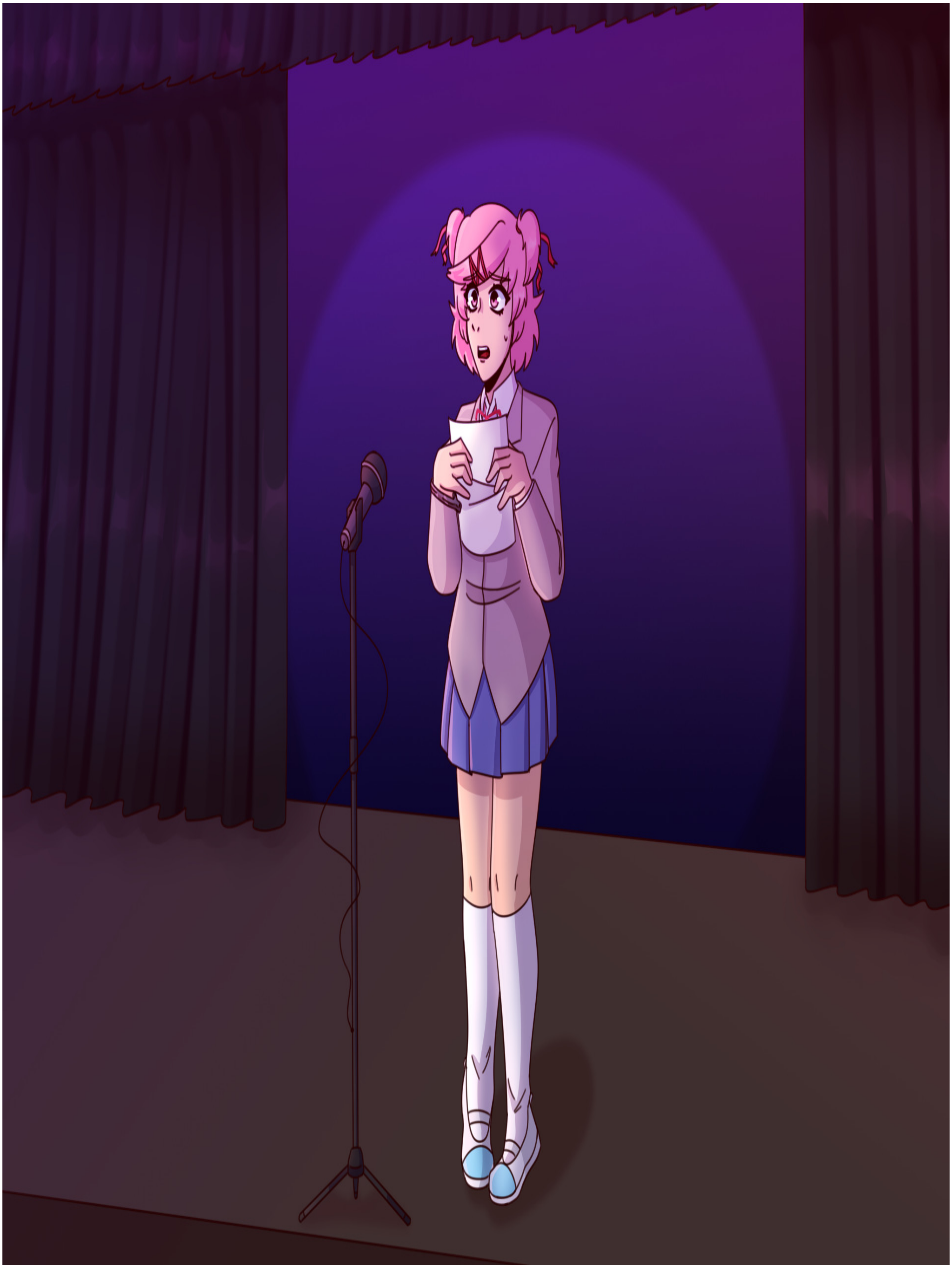
Jesse then jumped off the stage, leaving the audience focused on Natsuki. She huffed, looking down at her paper.

Natsuki: “Um–”

Feedback flared up from the microphone, Natsuki wincing back a little as she waited for it to die down.

Natsuki: “ *J-Jeeze* … So, my poem is called ‘To the Girl in Purple’.”

Taking a deep breath, Natsuki tore her eyes off the paper and out into the audience.



Natsuki:

“There’s someone I want you to know
A story waiting to show
A girl in the shimmering sun
Waiting for her chance to glow.

But your voices are too loud
You bite and snark and growl
She’s covered in ice and snow
And crushed down by the crowd.

The sin she bears is wrong
And yet she sings her song
But you won’t let her in
She’s drowning underneath the pond.

A hand reaches for her own
A whisp and sultry tone
They come from left and right
And push her further down under.

She’s drowning, she’s drowning, she’s drowning
Someone needs to save her
She can’t save herself
God knows she can’t save herself.

The water is frozen over

No longer can her screams be heard

Her face moulded in shame

And everybody looks away.

Everybody looks away the same.

And you are drowning with her too.”

As the final word left Natsuki’s lips, the venue was drowned in silence. Then, the group erupted into applause, causing her to tense up with a blush and book it off the stage with a curt ‘thank you’ under her breath. As she dashed past the bar, she was blocked by Bojack who held his hand out to stop her.

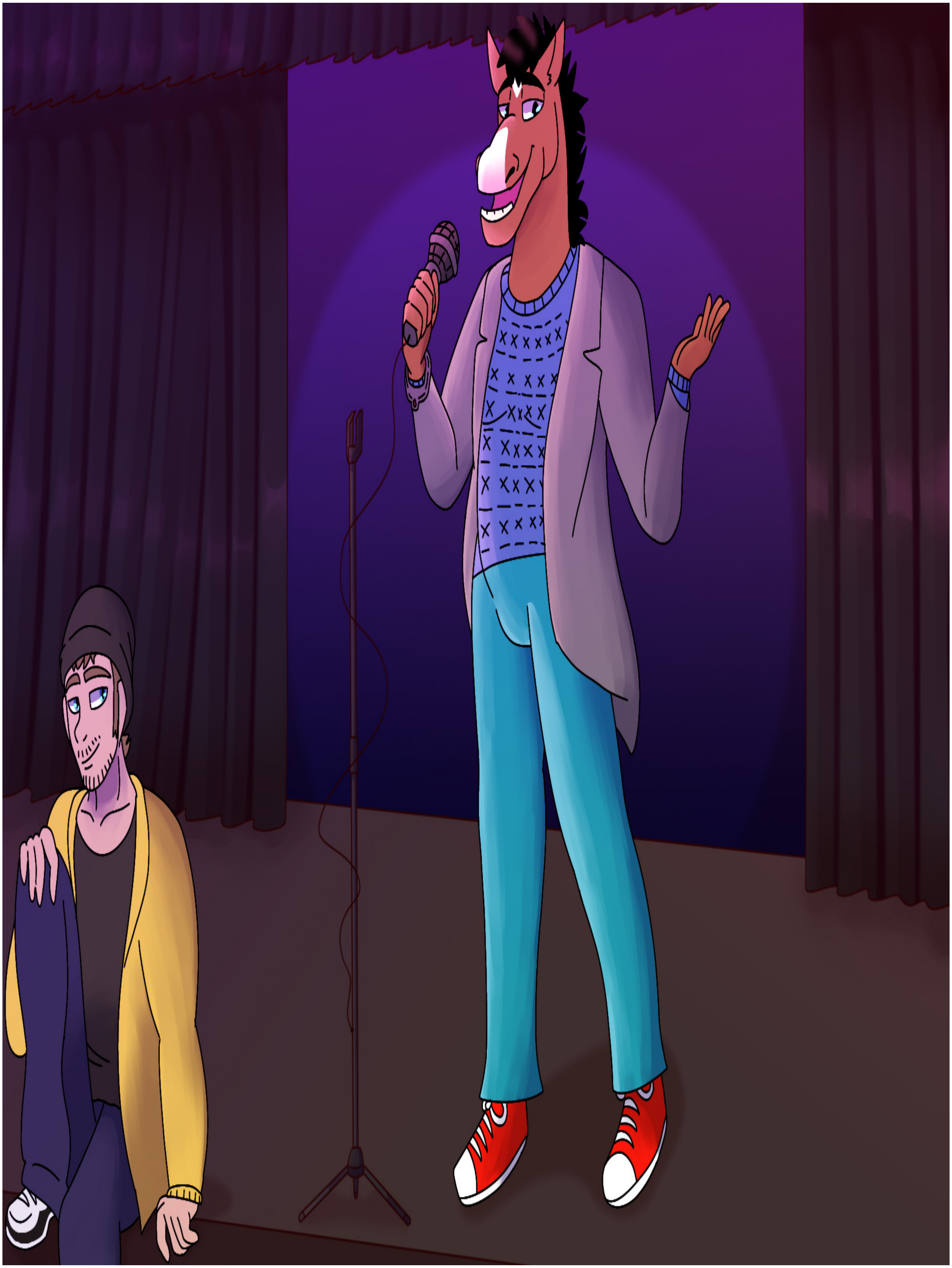
Bojack: “Uh, hey, that poem was good. You should be proud of that applause. They liked it, and if Yuri was here to hear it, then I’m sure she would’ve appreciated it too.”

Natsuki: “Um, t-thanks…”

Cooled off a little, Natsuki trudged back to her seat beside Ena who gave her two thumbs up. Jesse leaped back on stage, snagging the microphone a second time.

Jesse: “Oh man, wasn’t that a performance or what, yo? Alrighty then, now it’s time for the main event of the night: put your hands together for our stand-up star, Bojack!”

As the group gave out a complimentary round of claps once again, Bojack made his way on stage with heavy steps. Jesse nudged him with a ‘good luck’, raising the mic stand up before leaving the stage to the other. Exhaling, Bojack grabbed the microphone as he tried a relaxed grin.



Bojack: “Hey, everyone, happy to be here. Or, am I? I mean, I don’t have to comment on the state of our so-called vacation job’s been so far, but seriously, we should’ve just been taken to Florida instead.”

No one piped up a laugh. In fact, most of the group’s faces were left blank, Hayasaka included.

Ena: “...What is a ‘Florida’?”

Bojack: “...Uh, *ahem* , anyway… Are we all familiar with Seinfield? Haha.”

Silence again. Bojack’s face dropped.

Bojack: “... *Shit* .”

Hayasaka winced at the uncomfortable air, the second-hand embarrassment eating at him. Bojack looked toward Jesse, but even he shook his head with a sympathetic shrug.

Bojack: “...Alright, screw it. Who needs pre-planned material, anyway? I just gotta go with the flow – that’s how the best stuff gets out. So, hey, a few weeks ago I was waiting in line at the store, right, and this one guy, well, he calls out to me. Asks me ‘is that the Horse from Horsin’ Around?’ I am Bojack Horseman from Horsin’ Around, by the way. Anyway, so he asks me for my autograph and I’m like, well sure. But it turns out it was just a trick to cut the line in front of me. Naturally, I was pissed off. And this guy, he has the audacity to then ask me: why the long face?”

Hayasaka: “H-Haha…”

Despite letting a small chuckle escape at the cheesy joke, Hayasaka shrunk back into his seat as the others around him stared on.

Bojack: “See? This guy gets it.”

Bojack then paused from the prolonged lack of reception.

Bojack: “...Or maybe he just has bad taste.”

Hayasaka: “But you’re the one who told the joke.”

Hayasaka heard Kurumada snicker beside him.

Bojack: “Alright, I’m the one doing the stand-up here. You can’t just laugh at what anyone else says.”

Kurumada: “In that case, why don’t ya sit down?”

The group instantaneously broke out into laughter, finally breaking the tension. Bojack’s brow creased, clutching the microphone harsher in his grip.

Bojack: “ *Ha-ha* , very funny. Now listen here, pal–”

CREAK

Everyone paused. Light seeped in through the open door as someone stepped inside. Turning around, they all stared upon the new figure illuminated by the moonlight.

Natsuki: “Yuri…?”

Yuri: “...”

The room had been forced back to silence as Yuri observed around each and every person. Her posture was calm, and yet Hayasaka couldn’t help but feel his throat dry up.

Yuri: “...What’s wrong? All I did was show up.”

Jesse: “Yeah, well, you’re a lil’ late.”

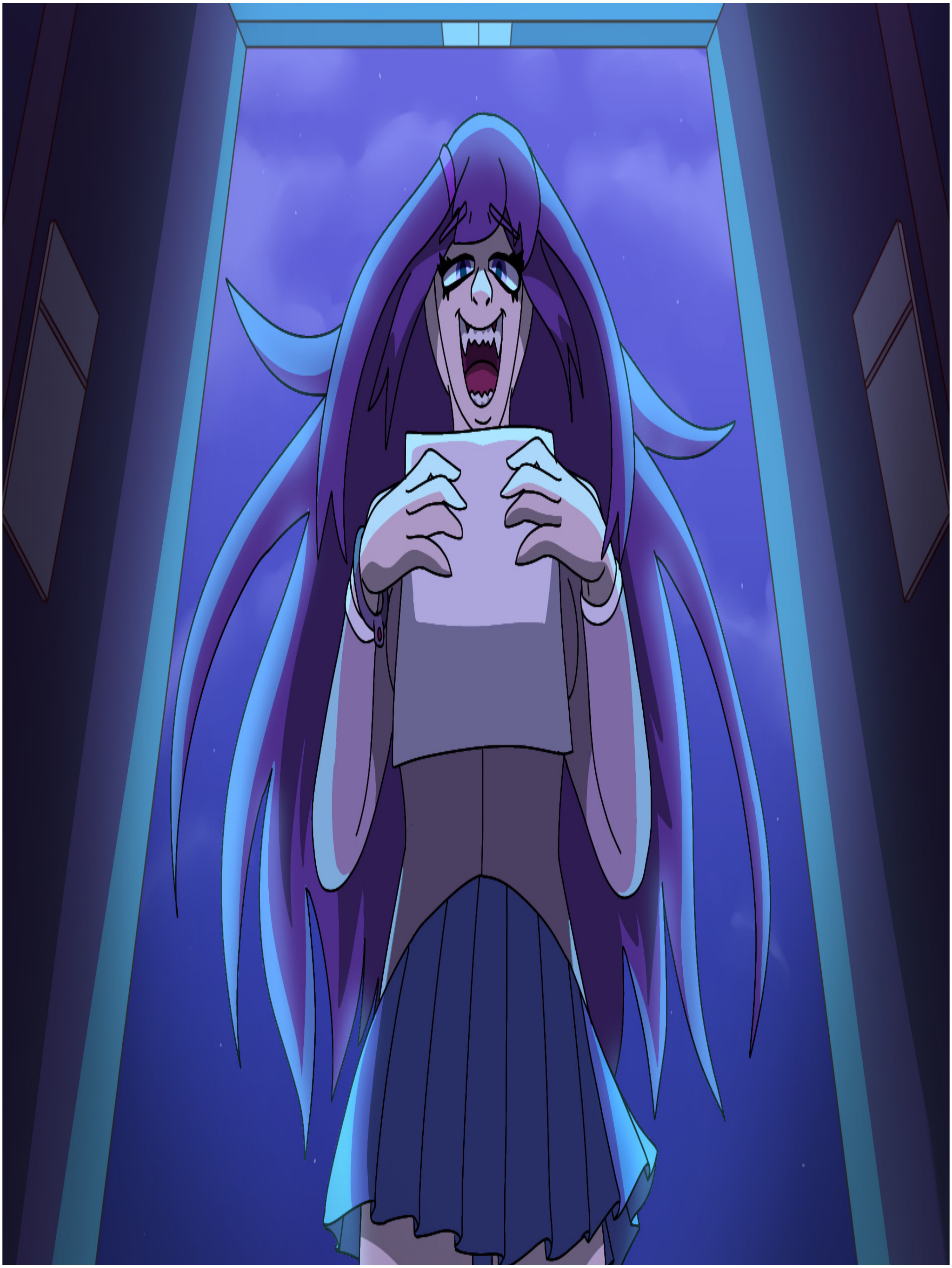
Bojack: “A lot more offending than a ‘little late’.”

Yuri: “Ha, I apologise. But, since you’re all looking this way anyway, I should make a start on my own performance.”

Brian: “W-What performance?”

Bojack: “Yeah, uh, I’m kind of actually in the middle of something right now–”

Disregarding the protests, Yuri took out a piece of paper from behind her back, inhaling a deep breath as she sighed out.



Yuri:

“I’m staring down the endless stairs of fate.

There is no noise in the dead of the night; the moon rises perfectly above my empty head.

It glows softly on my cheeks.

I feel like a saviour tonight.

Catching the sight of my beloved, her frail legs step into the blue moonlight.

But she drips red.

Like a waterfall she sheds a rusty liquid.

Slowly, slowly, out of her open mouth.

She screams to me. But it’s like a melody replaying in my head.

I am calm.

I am alive.

I watch as she falls back onto the shiny mattress.

Her eyes close softly.

She smiles.

I smile back.

Although she can never open her eyes again, I know her true feelings.

The chime strikes the fateful hour.

The Devil’s number doubled.

I wish I was only there sooner.”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…? What did… What did any of that mean…?”)

L: “...Well, that was certainly something.”

Jesse: “More like total B.S. – that didn’t make any damn sense at all.”

Kurumada: “I swear, if you’re just tryn’a spout more nonsense…”

Latte: “Yuri, what did that all mean?”

Yuri sighed, her face melancholy at all the comments that teared into her.

Yuri: “...I suppose I’ll never truly get through to you all anymore. Perhaps I’ve finally wedged the gap between us that I’m speaking foreign to you. Haha, i-it’s okay. I know it’s okay. We’ll never understand each other, and that’s okay. *Because I’m too far gone to want to care.* ”

Spinning on her heel, Yuri disappeared into the night.

Natsuki: “Gh! Y-Yuri!”

Natsuki jumped up from her seat and sped out of the stage bar after her, eyes watering in frustration.

Ena: “No, Natsuki! Please do not flee from me again!”

Latte: “I’m sure she knows not to go too far, as I’m bound to Yuri as well.”

Ena: “...”

Bojack: “...Well, I can’t top that. Seriously. I don’t feel like doing this anymore.”

Jesse: “Damnit… No, that’s fair. Just… What a bummer, man.”

As abrupt and disappointing as it was, the group were in mutual agreement to call the event off for the night, disbanding to go their separate ways.

Kurumada: “Right when it was gettin’ kinda interesting, too…”

Hayasaka: (“That was because you were making fun of Bojack’s act…”)

With no further plans, Hayasaka returned to the hotel. It was no surprise at this point when he caught sight of Saiki trekking back to the elevator up ahead, and his gaze strained on him.

Hayasaka: (“Saiki wasn’t interested in the event at all. Not just the stand-up, but the poems too. I swear I caught him putting in his earphones halfway through. Ah, god…”)

Tapping his palm against the side of his thigh for a moment in contemplation, Hayasaka sprung into a speed-walk to catch up to the boy and tapped his shoulder. Saiki ceased, motioning his head to peer behind him.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki, w-would you like to have a snack with me at the restaurant?”

Saiki raised a brow.

Hayasaka: “...How about coffee jelly?”

Nodding relatively suddenly, the other began to head towards the restaurant. Startled, but mostly relieved, Hayasaka followed. He grabbed two coffee jelly cups from the kitchen, seating himself opposite to the boy. For now, he allowed the other to enjoy the treat in silence, attempting to gather his thoughts on his next move.

Hayasaka: ("Saiki appears… rather content. He looks more absorbed in the coffee jelly than anything else today, haha…") "...How is it?"

Saiki nodded, scooping another generous helping onto his spoon as if it was his first meal in forever. The reaction was endearing, but hardly any engagement at all to satisfy Hayasaka's restless mind.

Hayasaka: ("...God, why can't I just find something to talk about with him? Every conversation I've had either leads to a stump or complete silence. I just… feel like I'm doing something wrong.")

Gut churning at his lost appetite, his hand dropped to his side. It brushed past something in his pocket, slipping into the fabric to retrieve what he had kept on him since the beginning: Gin's letter. Unfolding the letter, the creasing of the paper echoed much more audibly in the desolate restaurant, causing Saiki to observe what he was doing behind his olive lenses.

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "Ah, you want to know what I'm reading? Haha, it's nothing really… Just the letter we received from the first motive. I've kept hold of it all this time, ah, does that make me sound weird?"

Saiki shook his head. From his continuous gaze on the letter, Hayasaka assumed he was interested in the sender.

Hayasaka: "It's from my, uh, well the best way I can explain it is the child I look after from time to time as a sort of babysitter-slash-family-friend. His name is Gin."

Eyes scanning what Gin had written once more, he sighed.

Hayasaka: "...I miss him. I really do. If Gin was here right now, he'd probably say something to cheer me up… O-Of course, I'd rather Gin not be here in our current situation, haha… Ah, you must have friends and family worried for you at home, as well as K–..."

Hayasaka almost clasped a hand around his mouth as he cut himself off from speaking any further. Saiki stopped mid-chew, staring down hard at the table as his jaded expression drained into nothing.

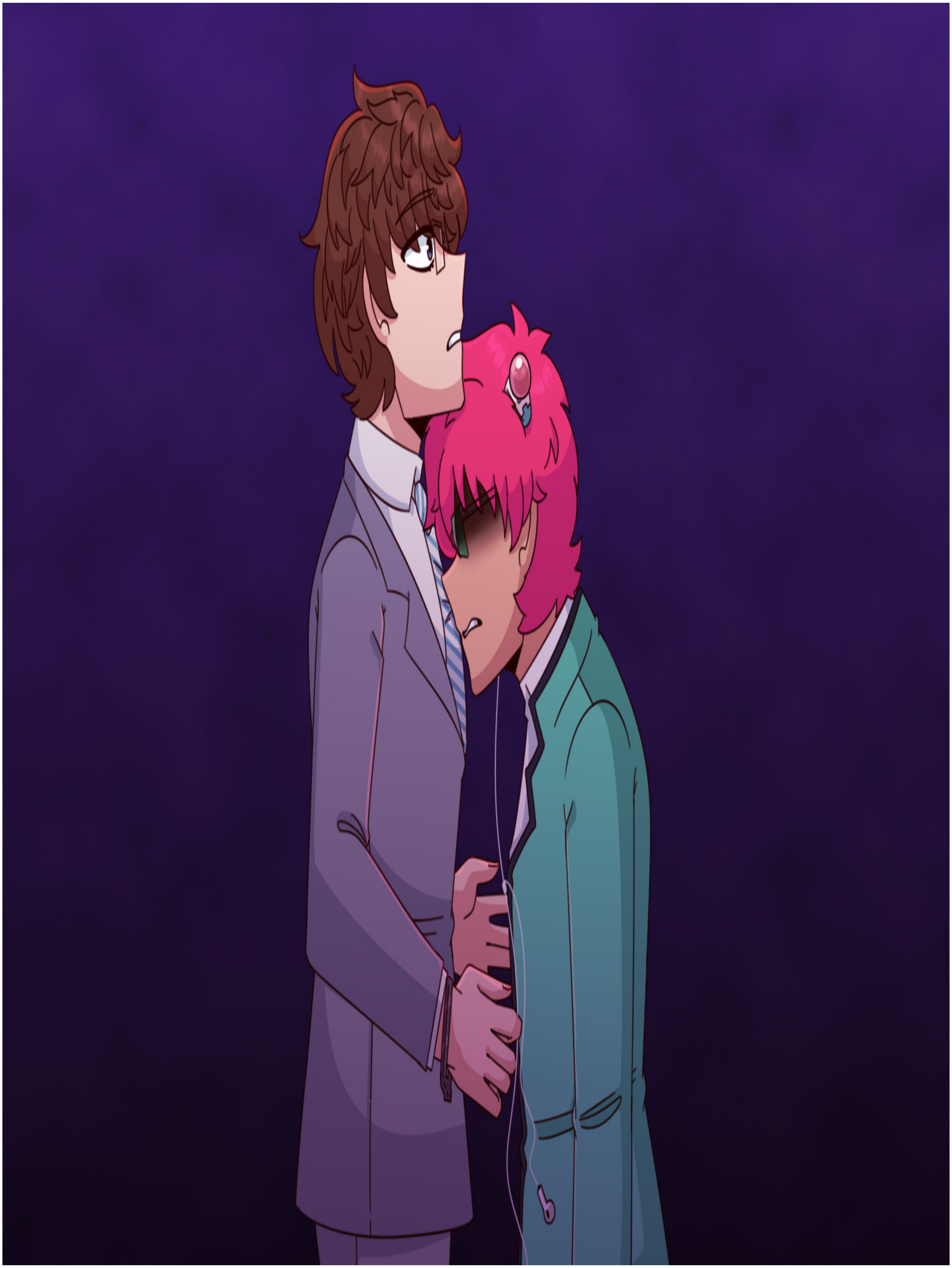
Hayasaka: “S-Saiki, I’m so sorry…! I wasn’t paying attention to what I was about to say a-and…”

But it was far too late for any reprimands. The other didn’t respond. The other wouldn’t respond. Not anymore. Anything Hayasaka had previously attempted to build up with Saiki – the tour, the shrine, the coffee jelly – had all crashed down in front of him with one simple syllable. And it was all his fault. His insides twisted, nauseated with disgrace for himself.

As a last attempt to remedy what he could in his own distant way, Hayasaka rose from his seat and hovered his hand above Saiki’s shoulder, unsure if it was even appropriate anymore to comfort him.

Hayasaka: “...I’m sorry, Saiki. I truly am, for everything I’ve done. I’ll leave you alone from now on; I won’t cause you any more trouble. I-I just wonder why I didn’t stop myself sooner…”

But before he could even turn away, a blur of pink dived into his chest, knocking the wind out of him and sending him stumbling back a few paces. Startled, he looked down.



It was *Saiki* . Hayasaka's eyes widened, mind boggled in confusion. But gradually, he realised what was going on. He realised what the other wanted. Lifting his arms up from his sides, he gently wrapped them around Saiki's back. His grip was loose, and he barely felt like he was even touching the other, but he had to make an attempt over nothing. He *wanted* to make an attempt over nothing at all. Saiki was still, but faint tremors were present in his stance.

It was then when Hayasaka swore he could pick up something faint: hitched, gurgled, and muffled against the fabric. It was *sobbing* . His heart cracked, tightening his grip on the other. He might've just been hearing things in the dead space of the restaurant, but that didn't matter. Saiki needed that shoulder to cry on. Or chest to tremble into. Or whatever the hell he wanted. The how didn't mind – it was the who that was needed. Hayasaka swallowed his nerves, voice conformed to a mutter.

Hayasaka: "...I won't leave you alone, if that's what you want."

Saiki: "*... I don't understand. I don't know why I don't want to be left alone. Even if I really want to be. If I have to… then please, let it be you.* "

Hayasaka: "Of course, Saiki. I-I'm not going anywhere."

Hayasaka kept his embrace firm, mentally noting how Saiki's breathing began to ease itself to a steady rhythm. Soon, Saiki made a sign of wanting some space and Hayasaka let go. No tears were present on his face once he got a good look, but his eyes were definitely red.

Hayasaka: "...H-Haha, I have to wonder why me out of anyone else. Not L, who gave you the escape of those earphones, or even Natsuki or Jesse who're probably going through a similar state to you."

Saiki looped an earbud wire around his finger.

Saiki: "*... They're not like you. It's because you're average* ."

Hayasaka: "A…Average? Is that supposed to be a pro…?"

Saiki nodded.

Saiki: " *I prefer average people. They don't draw attention to themselves. They live peaceful lives. You don't stand out, but I like that* ."

Despite what he should have thought to have felt, Hayasaka wasn't offended at all.

Hayasaka: ("Does Saiki not see himself as average in that case? If so, why? What could possibly go on in his life otherwise? And, I suppose he's right: I *am* average, in every sense of the term. But, I've never seen it as a good thing. No, even if I don't understand it now, it's best not to let Saiki talk more than he already has. He's clearly had enough, and to be honest, I have too…")

A noiseless yawn slipped out of Saiki, snapping Hayasaka out of his cumbersome thoughts. His mind passed by the word 'cute', but he made sure to repress the idea.

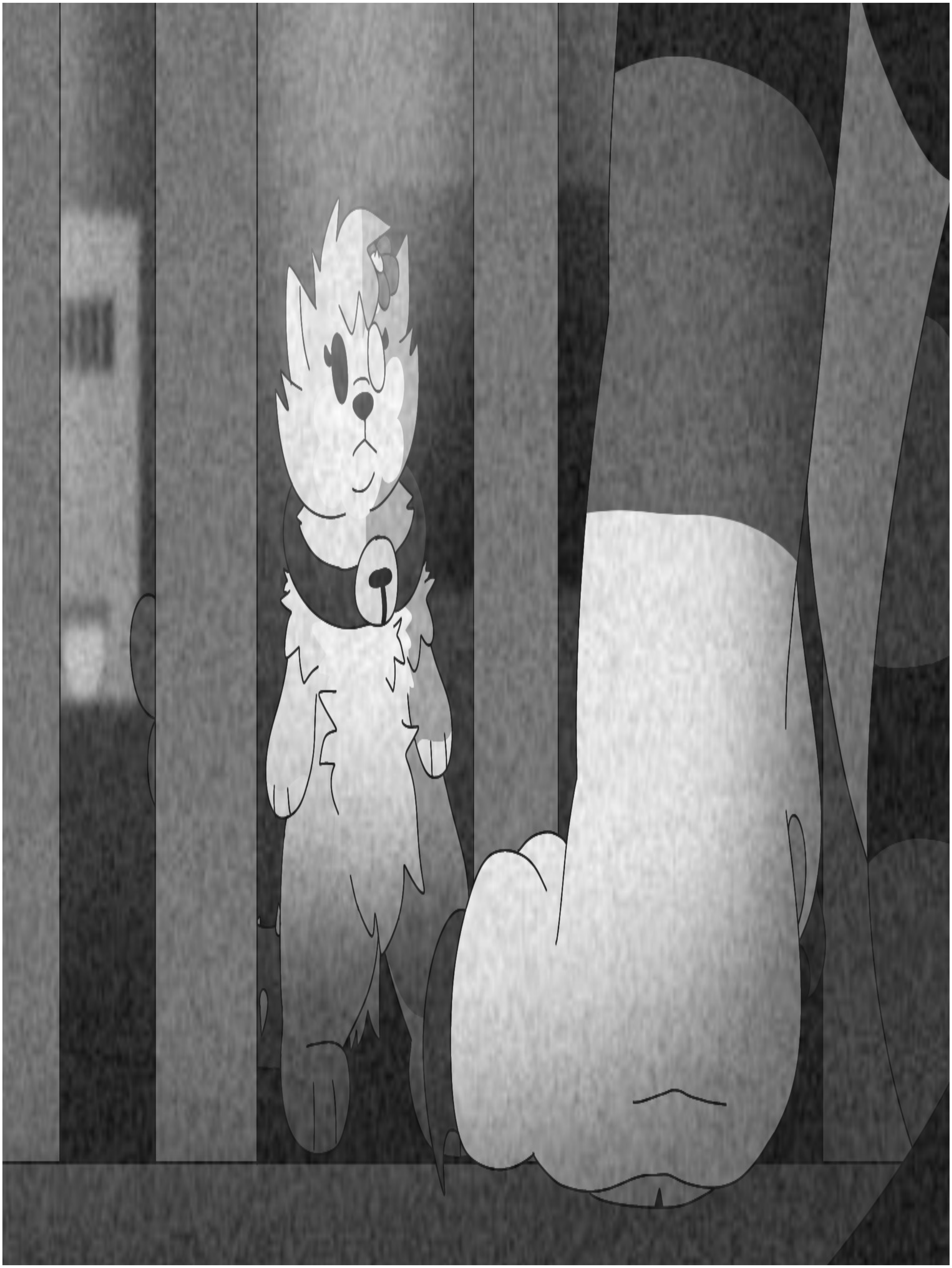
Hayasaka: "...We should probably both head to bed now. It's been a long day."

After making sure Saiki would be alright on his own, Hayasaka retired into his hotel room.

Hayasaka: ("I just have to wonder… What was Yuri trying to say earlier? Her poem… Was she upset we didn't understand? Did she even want us to understand? I… I just don't know if I want to think about it anymore.")

Disgruntled to ponder any further, Hayasaka went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: “Hey dude, I need you to come over to me for a minute. I have to show you something.”

Monotora: “...Mmm… No.”

???: “Really? You don’t want to? But it's really important.”

Monotora: “No food, not interested.”

???: “If I bring you food, will you then come over?”

Monotora: “...Fine.”

???: “Give me a minute then, I’ll grab some chicken for you.”

Monotora: "Hmph…”

…

Monotora: “You can't hide. Your sweet scent gives you away in here."

Dokuhana: *Squeak!?*

Monotora: *sniff sniff...* "So *you're* the thing I've been smelling for the past few days…"

Dokuhana: *Squeak! Squeak!*

Monotora: "No, I don't plan on eating you. You ain't edible and I ain't into veg either with all those flowers in your fur."

Dokuhana: *Squeak squeak? Squeak!*

Monotora: "Don't know what the guy's been doing to us, but they definitely did something so that only I can understand you."

???: "S-Shit! Hana you weren't supposed to show yourself until I said it was safe to!"

Monotora: "I ain't doing any harm. So it's Hana, eh?"

Dokuhana: *Squeak!*

???: "I— uh… was going to talk about how you and Hana were… going to stick together—especially when the other workers and I aren't around to look after you both in here."

Monotora: "... You want me to look after her by myself?"

???: "I would say so. But we also need to talk about another thing. In the next few days, we're going to start moving you and Hana into an open area cage much bigger than this room. However, we'll have to start some proper testing with you in particular, 'Tora."

Monotora: "The hell's all this testing comin' from?"

???: "It's sudden, I know, but the boss has been vague with what he wants to use you for specifically. Though I do know that he wants to see how you move in different environments… *Or if you bite someone...* In the meantime though, you should uh, start to get to know Hana more since she's going to be cooperating with you from now on."

Dokuhana: *Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!*

Monotora: "...Alright, fine. Now leave me alone."

???: "Right. I'll let you out of the cage Tora and whenever you want to leave, Hana, just go through the cat flap."

Monotora: "Aye-aye."

Dokuhana: *Squeak squeak!*

DING DONG, BING BONG

The moment Hayasaka left his room in the morning, he instinctively made eye contact with Saiki’s door. He made no move to approach it, however, deciding that it would be best not to disturb him after the emotional drain he gave himself the night prior. Navigating to the kitchen instead, he instead bumped into a familiar face. It was Mai, but instead of her usual idle smile, Hayasaka noticed, she appeared almost contemplative.

Hayasaka: “Mai? A-Are you alright?”

Seemingly unfazed, Mai perked up with a smile.

Mai: “Oh, Hayasaka! Sorry if I made you worry: I was just unsure on what to bake today, hehe.”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t think that’s the truth.”

Mai: “Ah, you caught me. I’ll come clean: it’s about you and Kurumada. I couldn’t help but notice you two sitting alone together at the venue last night.”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, that? Haha, he sort of dragged me away from sitting with the other guys, I suppose… It’s not really anything.”

Mai: “But it’s not just that. Don’t think I forgot how Latte and I found you together at the cafe, or that beach invite you told me about, either.”

Unsure how to respond, Hayasaka rubbed the back of his neck, causing Mai to giggle.

Mai: “Hahaha, I’m not trying to interrogate you. I’ve just noticed how you two have become so close in such little time, have you not?”

Hayasaka: “W-We’re friends; it’s only natural we’d spend time with each other.”

Mai: “Then how about we pay him a little visit in the gym right now? I’m sure he’d love to see us.”

Hayasaka: (“That is… I’m unsure if Mai has ulterior motives, but in all fairness, I don’t think I’ve ever really visited Kurumada all that much in the sports centre before.”)

Following Mai to the gym, the two were immediately greeted to the rowdy shout of Kurumada as he jabbed clean into a punching bag, the thick reverb almost intimidating Hayasaka into stopping in his tracks. Sensing their presence, he whipped around, wiping his brow with a lopsided grin.

Kurumada: “Uh, hey! Didn’t expect to be creeped up on this morn’, heheh.”

Mai: “So we can’t visit you in your man cave now either, hm?”

Kurumada: “Oi. I’m just in the zone.”

Riling up his fist, Kurumada aimed back at the heavily abused bag.

Mai: “Tsk, you’re so rude.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Then how ‘bout you have a spin at it, if you’re so insistent.”

Mai: “Oh, no, no. A lady should not be made to do such a heavy task.”

Kurumada: “Aw, c’mon. Ladies can do whatever they want to. Surely you outta all people would jump at an opportunity like this.”

Mai: “I appreciate the offer, but I don’t want to do it, anyhow.”

Hayasaka: “I-I mean, she’s hardly dressed for it, haha…”

Mai: “Oh, why don’t you have a go, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “What? N-No, I’m fine, really.”

Kurumada: “Ha, that I’d like to see.”

Taking hold of Hayasaka’s wrist, Kurumada guided him towards the punching bag. Although his grip was loose, Hayasaka was stumped on whether or not he should let go or just suck it up.

Hayasaka: “A-Am I being punished for something…?”

Both Mai and Kurumada chuckled.

Kurumada: “It’s nothin’ hard. C’mon, I can help ya out if ya–...”

Kurumada paused, eyes trailing off towards the gym’s entrance. Hayasaka peered over his shoulder, mentally sighing in relief at who he saw.

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki…”

Mai: “Oh! That reminds me that I haven’t even made a start on breakfast yet! Let’s hope Latte isn’t wondering where I am, hehe.”

Kurumada: “What about our thing?”

Hayasaka: “W-We can pick up another time…” (“Saiki, I owe you my life…”)

Kurumada shrugged, and the three alongside Saiki began to head back to the restaurant. That was, until Mai cupped her hand around Hayasaka’s ear.

Mai: “ *You saw how eager Kurumada was when I suggested you try the punching bag, didn’t you* ?”

Hayasaka: “ *S-So you did that on purpose, huh…* ?”

Mai offered a mischievous smile as she skipped ahead. However as they entered the restaurant, Hayasaka took immediate attention to how everyone present looked concerned.

Brian: “Oh, there you guys are! Phew, haha…”

Kurumada: “‘Phew’?”

Mai: “Hm? Where’s Latte?”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…?”)

L: “It appears a few of us are still missing. And as our latest-comer has already arrived, I doubt it is to do with tardiness at this stage.”

Bojack: “OK, I’m not usually *that* late. Probably.”

Hayasaka: “Wh…Who’s missing?”

Jesse: “Now that you guys are here, I think it’s just Latte, Natsuki, Yuri, and… Ena.”

Brian: “What should we do?”

L: “I propose we all split up in our pairs to locate their whereabouts. There’s only so many places they could be after all.”

Bojack: “We’ll take the first island. I don’t really feel like walking too much.”

Jesse: “That’s fine with me – we could go double check if one of ‘em’s still in their room upstairs.”

Brian: “T-Then me and L can take the second island. Maybe Yuri or Natsuki are at the library?”

L: “Hm, both do go there quite often.”

Kurumada: “And that leaves us to search the third island, eh?”

Mai: “Oh, I do hope they’re all okay…”

As the limited group split up on their search party, Hayasaka began to develop a sinking feeling in his stomach. Scouring around the third island, they came short on no one. The last place was the clocktower, but as Kurumada and Mai went inside, Hayasaka was promptly held back by Saiki’s outstretched hand. The look in his eyes was cloudy, and as Hayasaka attempted to decipher what he was trying to communicate, *it* all came crumbling down once again.

???: “Oh my goodness!”

???: “What the *fuck* ?!”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Well would ya look at that, a fresh piece of prey has been found! Well to you who hasn't eaten a single human, it's just a dead body to you. As this event has been triggered, you all have a certain amount of time to gather up as much evidence as possible before the class trial! Walk your lazy ass to the clock towers where you'll see your friend with their body crumpled up like a ball of paper. Heheheh…”

Hayasaka: “ *Oh god* –”

Upon hearing the distressed shouts of his friends followed by the announcement, dread filled into his every pore as he and Saiki dashed inside. He slammed down on his heel as he saw the two frozen over something on the floor. He matched their line of sight.

He really wished he hadn’t.

This time, Hayasaka almost passed out. *Almost* . Because what was keeping him afloat was the pure adrenaline and horror running through his veins as he could only stare at the scene displayed before him. The more he wanted to turn away, the more he couldn’t. Every little detail stuck out to him like a sore thumb. Every disjointed *limb* and every cracked *bone* .

Every piece of this utterly contorted body.

…

[BDA]

…

Every piece of *Ena’s* twisted, broken body, lying in their own static blood.

And if only things could’ve ended there .

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “DOUBLE WHAMMY! Another prey to be eat– no, wait, I can't see a thing, unless I'm just lookin' with my poor eye instead – even though I got eyes on my paws to look around if I gotta… Anywho! Not only you'll have to gather evidence for one dead coworker, but for TWO! Make your way to the library, or quietly if you wanna follow the library rules so badly keheh… Well better hurry up then workers! Clock's ticking…”

Hayasaka: “... *What was that* …?”

Kurumada: “Did… Did that go off *twice* ?”

Mai: “But the message… It was completely different.”

Saiki: “...”

Kurumada: “Shit! Then what the hell are we standin’ around for?! It said the library, right? C’mon!”

Hayasaka wasn’t exactly sure when he started sprinting again, but he could hardly feel his legs as they sped back towards the second island. Reaching the library, they almost crashed into another group approaching from the path opposite. Readjusting his slipping glasses, Hayasaka recognised it was Jesse and Bojack.

And with them was Natsuki.

Jesse: “Shit, did you guys hear the two announcements too?”

Mai: “We just came from one ourselves…”

Natsuki: “What? Who–Who died?”

Kurumada: “...It was Ena.”

Natsuki’s face dropped, mouth ajar as she struggled for words.

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki…”)

Bojack: “Wait, so who’s the second–”

Brian: “G-Guys!”

Hayasaka: “B-Brian…?”

Whipping his head to the library’s entrance, Hayasaka watched Brian burst out from the door, frantically waving out to them.

Brian: “Y-You have to–come inside–what happened–!”

He appeared visibly disturbed, hardly able to form a coherent sentence from his stilted breaths. And Hayasaka surely wasn’t prepared to find out why.

Regardless, they piled inside, only to halt as they saw L, observing something. Although he didn’t acknowledge their presence, he pointed towards a nearby bookshelf. A knocked over bookshelf.

That should’ve been what tipped Hayasaka off that something was terribly wrong the minute he set foot inside.

He wanted to kneel over. He wanted to fall to his knees. He wanted to slam his head against the ground to prevent himself from looking at what he had seen at the clock tower and now. A few strands of hair. There were only a few strands of hair but Hayasaka could tell exactly who he was looking at.

Exactly who had fallen victim to this death game despite all.

…

[BDA]

…

Ena, at the clock tower, and now *Yuri* , crushed between the floor and bookshelf.

She was dead.

Both were dead.

Chapter End Notes

You right now: oh my god bruh, oh hell nah man, what the fuck man? who invited this kid?

tmw antag is dead before chapter 5?!?!??!? (explosions) haha.... I can't wait to see the reactions for this one.... (locks my door tightly)

Also just a note about some of the FTEs: apologies if Yuri's comes across as a bit jarring, and that's mainly because all the FTEs have been pre-written (hers is kinda supposed to work pre and post trial 2 but ya know)// the same thing for Saiki bc as he's basically unavailable for the first two slots and then chained to Hayasaka for the last two, it was a lil' hard to write around that but I hope it flows alright (also it's implied he's close by during Natsuki's FTE so no they're all fine from blowing up lol)

Chapter 3: Chained to the Grief (Deadly Life)

Chapter Notes

> Welcome back to absolute hell on Earth
> It was very interesting seeing the reactions to the previous deaths honestly. There was quite a varied response for sure haha
> Anyway, uh, oh boy, after that whole doozy, what's gonna happen now? I guess there's only one way to find out...

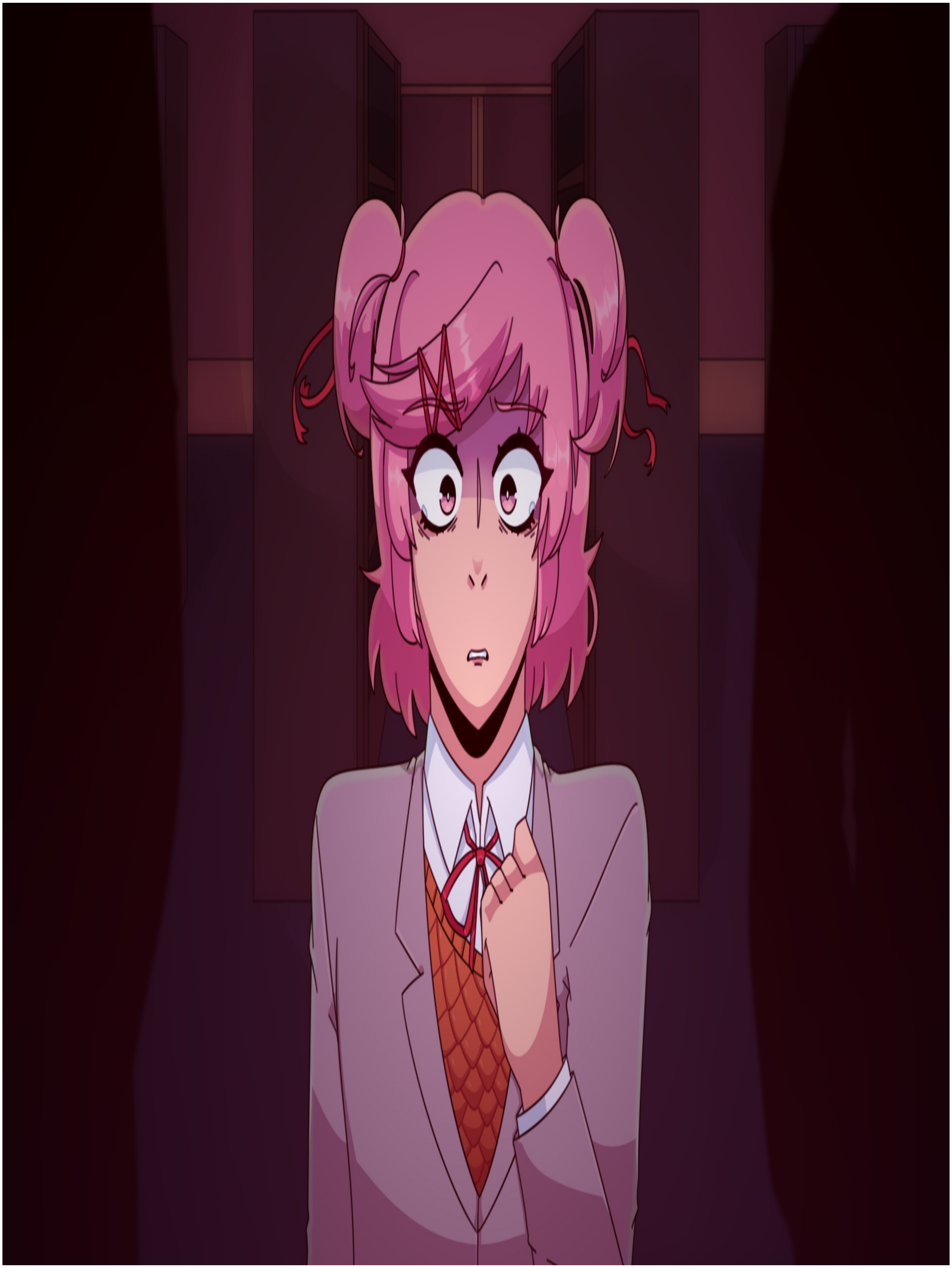
See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayasaka's mind couldn't help but reflect back on the night before. Everyone at the stage bar, enjoying each other's company despite the pain and trauma inflicted upon them thus far. All apart from the outlier: Yuri. There she was, spouting her plans to end the death game in her own twisted way – an exchange of their lives for the cease of their suffering – but Hayasaka could never agree to it. Not because of any higher reason, but because he didn't know if he could give up his life so easily. He didn't want to die, and he especially didn't want anyone else to again. And while means of escape were becoming slim, he hoped there would be some sort of silver lining in their cloud to save them.

And yet here she was. Lying dead as anyone could see. Even if she was obscured, it was clear she'd never make another remark or another move again. And especially alongside someone like Ena. How could Ena die? He didn't think Ena was even capable of dying.

But in a death game, he realised, none of that mattered to anyone.

Natsuki: "Wha… Y… *Yuri* …?"



Snapped out of his thoughts by the small voice, Hayasaka turned to see Natsuki frozen in place, knees quivering as she stared hard at the bookshelf. Her mouth wavered for a moment before she suddenly began to hurk, knees buckling as she tumbled down to the ground. The wet, vile sound of her insides being churned echoed throughout the library.

Jesse: “Shit! Natsuki!”

Unexpectedly, Jesse was the one to jump down to her side, frantically rubbing her back as he held onto her frail shoulder for support. Seemingly being pushed into action as well, Bojack sped to grab a nearby trashcan and slid it over to Natsuki. Unfortunately, it was past the need for the gesture, as even when Jesse tried to guide her to use it, she had heaved up all that she could to the floor. Shakily, Natsuki raised her head up towards Jesse, strands of hair clinging around her mouth where they had been dabbled in her sick.

Natsuki: “I’m–I’m just seeing things, r-right…? Yuri isn’t… She’s not… Tell me she’s not… P-Please…”

Jesse: “I…”

The stammers of her voice paired with her wide-eyed look had rendered Jesse unable to reply; it was clear he didn’t want to lie to her, but he didn’t want to bear the truth either. He flicked his eyes between her and Bojack, who crossed his arms with a solemn look.

Bojack: “...She’s dead.”

Natsuki: “ *N-No… no no no no no no no–NO NO NO* !!”

Relentless wails began to drown the library in torment as Natsuki began to flood herself in tears. Every shout ate at Hayasaka who could only stand there in utter silence. He felt horrible, unable to do anything about it – what could any of them do to remedy this?

It’s not like they could bring back the dead.

Latte: “Natsuki…!”

It was Latte who then suddenly emerged from the group and rushed down to her side, embracing her in a tight hug as Natsuki reciprocated back, clinging on for dear life as if she was to suffocate her in her grip. No one had even questioned where Latte had come from, too overwhelmed by the sounds of the girl's grief. Latte hushed gently, rocking the two back and forth to steady the rhythm of the girl’s uneasy breathing. Her sobs continued, but gradually began to die out as her voice became croaky and overused.

Hayasaka felt a hand snake onto his own shoulder that offered a short-lived squeeze, mildly turning to see Kurumada shoot him a sympathetic look. He didn’t motion anything back, too dazed to even know if he could force himself to move at the time.

Monotora: “Argh – stop cryin’, would you?!”

A heavy paw strided down as Monotora teared onto the scene, irritation rife in their eyes.

Monotora: “I would’a thought you’d give it a rest sooner or later, but ya just had to piss me off, didn’t you–”

Natsuki: “Just–Just *fuck off* !”

Mai: “ *Natsuki* !”

Jesse: “Holy shit…”

Monotora: “Well well! Now you’re spewin’ out the foul language like that’s gonna shut me up? You’re a real pain in the ass, y’hear? This defiance ain’t gonna look good on ya grave–”

Kurumada: “Lay off her, would ya? She just lost her best friend for fuck’s sake.”

Monotora glared at Kurumada, snorting at the remark.

Monotora: “It’s her loss with her shitty feelings, you emotional meatbags. Hell, s’not like I have the need to take this further when I’ve already been gifted twice the bloodshed.”

L: “Regarding that, what was the purpose of two body discovery announcements? It surely wasn’t a mistake, given the two different locations.”

Monotora: “Kehehe, it’s simple: *two* people’ve died this time.”

Brian: “H-Huh? Who’s the other victim?”

L: “From the process of elimination, I assume it has to be Ena.”

Latte: “Ena? Oh my – that can’t be!”

Mai: “Unfortunately, he’s right. The others and I found them in the clocktower…”

Natsuki: “...”

Kurumada: “Speakin’ of, how the hell did two people die anyway?”

Bojack: “I thought you only had to kill one person to escape the island. Or does this give you extra brownie points with a body count?”

Monotora: “It’s up to youse bastards to figure that double kill out! I’m only here for the formalities n’ to remind ya ‘bout the Nesos File. *Also* , since a murder has occured, you’re all free from your paired imprisonment!”

With a click, Hayasaka felt his wrist become lighter as his cuff unlocked automatically, dropping to the ground with a clank and with many more following suit. Rubbing his wrist from its sore mark, he snuck a glance at Saiki. The two were no longer confined together.

Monotora: “Y’must be real happy to be set free, eh? Too bad our lifeless picasso n’ yandere ain’t so free from the afterlife – ahaha!”

Monotora snickered, bounding out of the library and letting the doors slam shut behind them, submerging the group in a soulless silence. Hayasaka watched out of the corner of his eye as L rubbed his chin quizzically.

L: “Hm, were the two killed by the same culprit? Or, perhaps these are two separate cases? Well then, there’s no good use in standing around. Is everyone ready to conduct the investigation?”

Latte slipped her arms off Natsuki, giving her breathing space.

Latte: “How do you feel about that, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “Find out Yuri’s killer… B-But she can’t be dead…”

Hayasaka: (“N-Natsuki… She’s avoiding coming to terms with reality. Yet, I understand why…”)

Jesse: “...Hey, c’mon, let’s go take a breather outside, alright?”

Natsuki didn’t reply, but allowed herself to be helped to her feet by Jesse. Hands resting on her shoulders, he began to lead her towards the library’s entrance. He looked over his shoulder at Bojack with an expectant look, who in turn nodded and followed the two out.

Brian: “...Ah, so how are we going to investigate with two bodies this time?”

L: “We’ll just have to work a little faster than usual to get both thoroughly searched in time. Kurumada, I advise you watch over Ena’s body at the clocktower.”

Kurumada: “Eh, why me?”

L: “I’d appreciate a person fit for a bodyguard role, and since Bojack is currently occupied, only you are available for the job.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Then what if I’m the killer or somethin’? Then I could go ahead and mess around with the crime scene by myself.”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada…”)

L: “I won’t have to worry about that, seeing as Brian and I will be joining you over there regardless.”

Brian: “W-Wait, what? Why *me* ?”

L: “I’ve gotten used to you being my partner of sorts. Additionally, I would like a second individual there just in case Kurumada really does turn out to be the culprit.”

Although faces discontent, both Kurumada and Brian nodded.

Hayasaka: (“It seems that they’ve accepted their fates…”)

Mai: “If you guys are going to Ena, then me and Latte can look over Yuri for the time being.”

Latte: “We won’t tamper with anything until Natsuki’s ready, of course.”

L nodded, and began to leave with Kurumada and Brian in tow.

Hayasaka: (“It looks like my two investigation partners have been separated from me, h-haha… I suppose I really will have to look around on my own this time–”)

Hayasaka paused mid-thought as he felt his arm being poked. Turning his head, he noticed it was Saiki.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *I’d like to investigate with you* .”

Hayasaka: “O-Oh really? Then, I wouldn’t mind that.” (“I have to be honest, I’m not sure how good Saiki is at this. He’s usually quiet in trials – w-well that’s a given – but how he defended Kaidou last time was definitely noteworthy… And I suppose in a way I feel flattered that he even offered to continue working with me despite us being freed from each other. Maybe what he said last night really was the truth…”)

INVESTIGATION

Despite the usual routine, Hayasaka felt trapped in place on where to move next.

Hayasaka: (“Since there’s two people to look over this time, I’m afraid I won’t be able to put off the inevitable at such a pace as I have the previous times with Walter and Retsuko…”)

With the lack of any initial instruction, Saiki’s brows arched slightly towards his uneasy expression.

Hayasaka: “I-I’m alright, Saiki, really. It’s just, ah, I’m a little nervous to investigate two corpses this time around, that’s all…”

Saiki: “*... I don’t fancy looking at them either. But you’ve done it twice before, so surely it shouldn’t be that nerving* .”

Hayasaka: “I suppose… B-But I really don’t want to be known as the group’s coroner, haha…”

Saiki: “ *That position has already been self-filled by L if anything* .”

Hayasaka: “I-I guess so… So then, who should we investigate first?”

Saiki: “ *Ena. We need someone stronger to pry the bookshelf off of Yuri, anyway.* ”

Hayasaka: (“O-Ouch… Ha, but he is right, isn’t he?”)

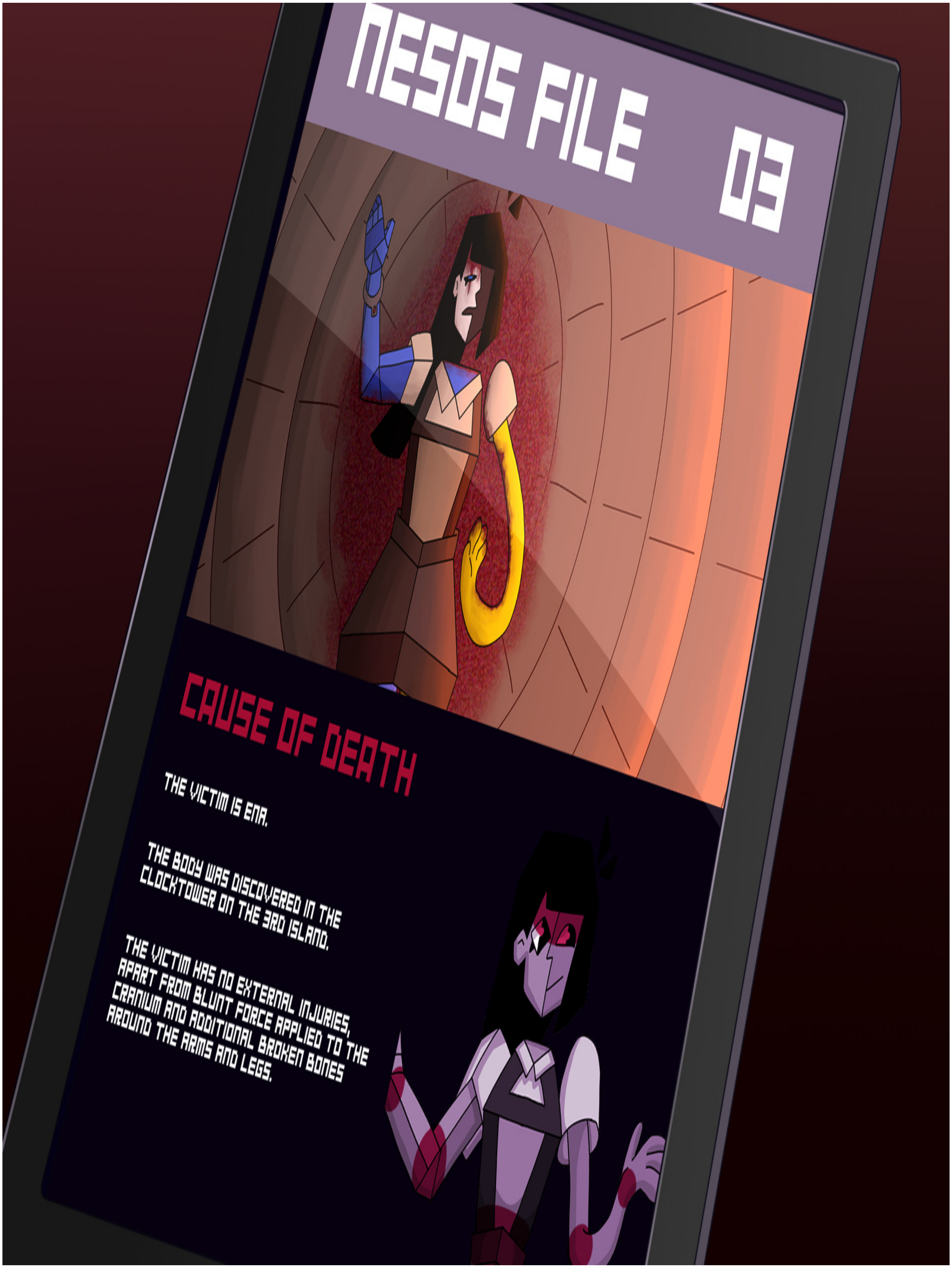
Turning on their heel, the two left the library for the clocktower, Hayasaka wondering upon Kurumada and Brian’s reactions upon meeting up again so soon. As they entered and walked into the main ground floor, they saw Kurumada standing over Ena’s body as Brian apprehensively followed L around the scene.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. Ya came here first, eh?”

Hayasaka only nodded, gulping as the sight of Ena’s horribly deformed body laid before him a second time.

Hayasaka: (“Seeing it again only confirms it’ll be engraved into my skull forever… God, how did this happen to you, Ena…?”)

On that note, Hayasaka pulled out his tablet and located the new Nesos File. There were two pages this time around, but for now he tapped on the file that briefed Ena’s case. Before he began to read it, however, he saw out of the corner of his eye Saiki peer around him to coin a look for himself. He had to dart his eyes away for a moment as the word ‘cute’ resurfaced in his mind again.


NESOS FILE 03
CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS ENA.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN THE CLOCKTOWER ON THE 3RD ISLAND.

THE VICTIM HAS NO EXTERNAL INJURIES, APART FROM BLUNT FORCE APPLIED TO THE CRANIUM AND ADDITIONAL BROKEN BONES AROUND THE ARMS AND LEGS.

The victim is Ena. The body was discovered in the clocktower on the 3rd Island. The victim has no external injuries, apart from blunt force applied to the cranium and additional broken bones around the arms and legs.

Wincing at the description of Ena's injuries, Hayasaka paused as he went to re-skim the file a second time.

Hayasaka: ("Hang on, there's something missing…")

Saiki: " *There's no time of death* ."

Hayasaka: ("Nor the cause, but I suppose it'll never be stated, huh? Haha…") "You're right. That is rather concerning…"

L: "I see you've caught wind of the new file anomaly. Without a time frame, it'll be a little tougher to confirm which alibis will be valid or not."

Brian: "And here I thought it was going to be harder enough with the two bodies-dilemma…"

Kurumada: "Am I gonna have to start fearin' for my life for real now? Heh."

L: "We do at least have a starting point to work upon; we all saw Ena last at the stand-up venue the previous night."

Hayasaka: ("That's still quite a wide gap in time… Hopefully we'll find a clue that'll cut the time frame down.")

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File #3: Ena

L: "So then, Hayasaka, I take it you plan to attend to your usual duties?"

L then gestured to Ena’s body. Hayasaka felt his body become heavy.

Hayasaka: “I… I don’t usually do it this quickly…”

Brian: “You shouldn’t push yourself if you don’t want to, Hayasaka.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, he’s suffered enough mental strain lookin’ over all these damn corpses as it is.”

L: “It appears you’ve built up quite the fanclub, Hayasaka.”

Kurumada: “ *Fanclub* ?”

L: “I merely jest. I do understand, however. Perhaps for now I can take a thorough look at the body myself and you can confide in me a little later.”

Hayasaka: “That… would be alright. T-Thank you, L.”

L: “There’s no need for thanks. Brian, you can help me get started – I’ll need a second opinion on the matter.”

Brian: “M-Me?!”

Kurumada: “Damnit – I’ll look as well if ya stop pickin’ on the fragile guys, alright?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear, these three are a bit chaotic together. I’m a bit relieved we came here first…”)

As L crouched down beside Ena’s body, he turned his head back to Hayasaka.

L: “While you and Saiki are waiting around, I suggest you two have a look at the top of the clock tower.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Why so?”

L: “It’s beneficial to search everywhere so a single clue does not go missed. It’ll be worth it even if only one clue is found.”

Hayasaka: (“Yes, but have you seen the amount of stairs there are? Not to mention how we’ll have to take the flight twice… Ah, but this is a life or death situation, so complaining won’t help, will it?”)

Reluctantly nodding, Hayasaka looked towards Saiki to gauge his opinion. His face was neutral, although laced with a hint of displeasure. At least he wasn’t the only one.

The ascending flight up the spiral staircase took about five minutes or so, and Hayasaka felt his face break out into a small smile of relief once they reached the top. His legs felt a little light, and he could only fear crossing that bridge again once they had to trek back down. Pushing that aside, he scanned the scene: above them was the clock’s internal mechanism, and just below a narrow area to stand around a set of railings that looked down onto the ground floor below. Stepping towards said railings, Hayasaka snuck a peek down. If that flight of stairs wasn’t telling enough, the deep height between him and the floor below definitely began to sink in, a wave of nausea hitting the back of his head as he quickly gripped onto the railing to steady himself. Feeling his hands be taken, he realised Saiki had gently pulled him away from the view of the drop.

Hayasaka: “T-Thank you, Saiki…”

Saiki shook his head flatly.

Saiki: “ *I wasn’t doing it to save you. You were about to touch a piece of evidence* .”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?”

Saiki moved back to pick up a long strand of black hair curled over the railing.

Hayasaka: "Black hair…? That must be Ena's, right? However, they're not the only one with black hair, are they? I suppose we shouldn't come to a conclusion just yet."

Saiki: " *That's the kind of diligent thing L would say. He better not be influencing you.* "

Hayasaka: "Ah, h-haha…" ("Is that necessarily a bad thing? Although, was Saiki *really* just moving me out of the way for the hair? I don't think was hardly near it…")

Truth bullet obtained: Black Strand of Hair

After continuing their search around the top floor, they came back with nothing else worth noting.

Hayasaka: "There really was only one piece of evidence up here after all, huh?" ("But that does confirm someone had been up here previously. I just don't know when…")

In dismay for the second journey, Hayasaka and Saiki descended back down the stairs to the ground floor. Hayasaka only wished that he'd never need a reason to return there ever again as they approached the others.

Brian: "Hey, guys. Um, you look a little tired, haha."

Hayasaka: "Unfortunately, our fatigue was really only worth a black strand of hair on the railing…"

L: "Hm, I see. I'd still say it was worth the look. I'm just about finished with Ena's body on my end."

L stepped aside to allow Hayasaka room to scope Ena. Glancing between everyone's faces, he let out a breath as he kneeled down before the pool of static.

L: “Regarding Ena’s external wounds, there is a large crack of the back of their skull right opposite the floor. As well as that, most of their bones seem to have been dislocated due to the strange contortions their body died in.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s just as L said from what I can see…”)

L: “What I find the most odd is how twisted their body appears.”

Brian: “Wasn’t Ena usually, um, flexible in their movements, though?”

L: “Yes, but consider how extreme it is here.”

Hayasaka: (“Extreme, huh? I suppose it is. But, who’s to say Ena couldn’t go to the extreme, such as what we’ve seen with their emotions? I’ll keep what L said in mind, however.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Ena’s Cracked Skull and Broken Bones

Kurumada: “Ena’s death must’ve been pretty screwed, eh? I mean, just look at their face.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I didn’t even realise Ena’s expression was different…” (“It’s half-white on their usual blue side…”)

Brian: “Hey, I remember seeing that face before… Don’t they appear like that when they’re upset?”

Hayasaka: (“Was this simply because of the murder? Or, was it something else…?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Ena’s Face Post-mortem

Hayasaka: “...Was there anything else you found, L?”

L: “That’s all I could spot. I’m assuming you’re confirming as you have no further leads yourself?”

Hayasaka: “Just about…”

In relief, Hayasaka stood back up and stepped away from Ena and back towards Saiki’s side.

Brian: “Hey, um, where’s Moony…?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Moony?”

Brian: “Yeah, I just realised she isn’t here. Usually she’s somewhere around Ena, right?”

Hayasaka: “That is true…”

L: “If she were here, I’m certain we would’ve found her by now.”

Hayasaka: (“If anything, she might know something about what Ena was doing last night. We’ll just have to keep an eye out for her, I suppose.”)

Kurumada: “S’that all we need to do here?”

L: “I do believe so. We should make one additional round of the ground floor, however, just in case.”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, we’re in need of a strong pair of hands to lift the bookshelf off from Yuri in the library to investigate her body…”

Kurumada: “Heheh, I’m flattered.”

Hayasaka: “I-It wasn’t necessarily flattery…”

L: “That’ll be fine. We’ll catch up with you in a while to do so.”

Making sure Saiki was ready to leave, the two returned back to the library. The first thing Hayasaka caught notice of was that Natsuki was back inside, alongside Jesse and Bojack. She was sat between the two a good distance away from the toppled bookshelf at one of the reading tables. After a moment of contemplation, he motioned for Saiki to follow him over to them. Despite their approach, she made no indication of movement, keeping her head arched down towards the oak.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Natsuki, h-how’re you doing…?”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “...She’s takin’ baby steps to see Yuri. I just want her to at least say goodbye to her, y’know? Somethin’ I wish I could’a done with Mr. White.”

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“That’s rather compassionate of him…”)

Glancing over at Saiki, he watched his face sour. He could figure why without having to ask.

Bojack: “God, this whole situation’s pretty messed up. I mean, it wasn’t like the previous two weren’t, but the idea of two murders never crossed my mind. Hell, and I’m in the acting industry.”

Hayasaka: “It’s not going to be easy, that’s for certain. Especially since I’m unsure where everyone was during the night…”

Jesse: “I mean, me n’ Bojack were in the woodworking shop for the majority of the night, if that helps.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Jesse: “Yeah, after the stand-up was cut short, we headed back over to the shop with a couple beers to continue workin’ on that box I was teaching him to make. I think it was around 12:30 when we decided to call it a night – we were gettin’ drunk, and it would’a been bad if the tiger found us while roamin’ around.”

Hayasaka: (“They were on the third island, then…”)

Jesse: “Also, uh, I dunno if I was just hearin’ things, but I swore I heard mumblin’ coming from the clocktower. I didn’t look into it at the time, though, ‘cuz I was more pressed in gettin’ us back to the hotel safely. Not to mention I had Bojack slung over my shoulder at the time.”

Bojack: “Look, in my defence I only drowned myself in alcohol to forget my failure of a stand-up act.”

Hayasaka: “I-It wasn’t that bad – I found one of your jokes funny, haha…”

Bojack: “What, the one promptly ruined by Kurumada?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, s-sorry…”

Bojack: “It’s fine. Anyway, I can’t exactly back up what Todd 2’s saying about the mumbling – mainly because I can hardly remember anything from last night.”

Jesse: “Great, now I look like I’m crazy.”

Hayasaka: “I-I believe you. Something definitely happened at the clocktower, after all. Thank you for the account.”

Jesse: “No ‘prob.”

Truth bullet obtained: Jesse's Account

Leaving Natsuki and the others alone for now so as not to overwhelm her, Hayasaka stepped away with Saiki.

Hayasaka: "What do you make of the alibi, Saiki?"

Saiki: " *It's fine. I'm more concerned about where Natsuki was at the time of the murders. Since she has connections to both Yuri and Ena, she seems suspicious either way* ."

Hayasaka: "You have a point there… However, I don't necessarily think she's in the right state to be questioned currently. We should give her some time so she can give a more coherent statement."

Saiki nodded in understanding.

Hayasaka: "As we can't check Yuri until Kurumada shows up, I suppose we should begin by looking around the bookshelf."

Stepping over to the toppled bookshelf, Hayasaka attempted to keep his vision locked off of what he could see of Yuri's body: her deep purple locks poked out from underneath, matted and spread in every which direction; her lone hand that reached out for salvation; the many books scattered around. Hayasaka could only wonder what she looked like once the shelf had been lifted.

Saiki: " *Hayasaka* ."

Hayasaka paused his search, whipping his head around only to spot his investigation partner was not beside him, but a few metres away at the nearby tables. Promptly, he joined over to him.

Hayasaka: ("How did he manage to sneak off so quietly?") "Did you find something?"

Saiki pointed down at a tabletop, revealing a multitude of shallow scratches scattered about.

Saiki: “ *It looks like they were made from a fight* .”

Running a finger down one of the narrow marks, Hayasaka hummed.

Hayasaka: “Definitely made from something sharp. You don’t suppose it’s from a pencil, huh? Haha…”

Saiki’s face drew to a blank at the cheesy joke.

Hayasaka: “Ah, I deserved the poor reception, didn’t I? A-Anyway, we should keep an eye out for something that could’ve made these.” (“Although, the sign of a struggle and Yuri’s presence is quite the familiar link, isn’t it?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Marks on Library Table

Latte: “Hey, guys.”

Both Hayasaka and Saiki turned to see Latte and Mai appear out from an aisle of bookshelves.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello. How’re you two doing?”

Mai: “We’re doing what we can. We’ve been doing a little searching around here ourselves, actually, and I think we came across something important. Since you’re turning out to be such the detective, Hayasaka, would you care for a look?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, what is it?”

Mai: “Well, I should give the credit to Latte, really. She picked up the smell using her oh-so brilliant nose!”

Latte: “Aw, Mai, you’re as sweet as milk!”

Latte smiled as she booped Mai’s nose.

Hayasaka: (“Ha…? A-At least they’re cheering each other up in their own way.”)

The two ladies then lead Hayasaka and Saiki further down into the library where they came across a pile of burnt books. The colours were desaturated, coated in a charcoal black as tattered pieces of pages littered the surroundings.

Hayasaka: “Ah, I understand now. You must’ve picked up the smell of the burnt books then, Latte.”

Latte: “It looks like my extra talent came in handy again. Although, I’m unsure who burnt these books or why…”

Mai: “I can’t help but feel it looks like a little campfire of sorts. Maybe someone found the library to be a bit chilly?”

Hayasaka: (“I-I don’t think that’s the reason for this… However, it’s clear someone was attempting to burn something with this fire, but whether it was these books or something else entirely, I don’t know…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Burned Book Pile

Mai: “We didn’t just find those books, however.”

Hayasaka: “What else did you find?”

But before anyone could answer, Saiki had begun to move behind the book pile and gestured to a toolbox. Hayasaka stepped over as he kneeled down to take a look inside.

Hayasaka: ("There's a lot of tools in here. I'm assuming this is from the supermarket… Oh? What's this?")

Hayasaka cautiously picked up a hammer with a dark mark on its head. Underneath where he had taken it from was also a box of matches.

Hayasaka: "Well, that's probably how the fire was made. But, what about this hammer…?"

Latte: "Maybe it was used as a weapon?"

Hayasaka: ("But how did this dark mark came to be if so?")

Truth bullet obtained: Toolbox

Replacing the hammer back, Hayasaka stood back up. He felt his shoulder be prodded again from Saiki as he pointed discretely towards Latte. His face remained stagnant for a moment, before gasping quietly in realisation.

Hayasaka: "Ah, Latte, you were missing this morning, weren't you? Could you tell us where you were?"

Latte: "I really am sorry for worrying you all previously. What happened to me… It's a bit of a crazy story."

Hayasaka tilted his head slightly.

Mai: "Apparently Latte was invited to the library last night by Yuri."

Hayasaka: “ *Y-Yuri* ? Is that true, Latte?”

Latte: “Ah, yep. You see, a little while after the stand-up venue had ended, I was sent a message on my tablet from Yuri requesting me to come to the library at 11:30P.M.”

Hayasaka: “And you went alone? Y-You didn’t think to be cautious about it?”

Latte: “As I said before, I don’t have any reason to fear a student. Although, I did take to heart what you said before about her unpredictable nature, so I admit I did arrive with a bit of caution. However, as soon as I stepped inside the library, I felt something sharp hit the back of my neck and blacked out.”

Hayasaka: (“Was she knocked unconscious…?”)

Latte: “I had only woken up in the morning a little further into the library, and as I tried to navigate to the entrance, I saw Yuri’s body under the bookshelf. At that moment I panicked, running outside to find help only to bump into Brian and L.”

Hayasaka: (“And so she must’ve led them to her body, where the second body discovery announcement was triggered…”)

Mai: “I’m just glad nothing horrible happened to you while you were passed out, Latte. You should’ve asked me to come with you.”

Latte: “Aw, I don’t deserve someone as compassionate as you, Mai!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well thank you for the account, Latte.”

Truth bullet obtained: Latte’s account

Latte: “We should let you two get back to your own investigation now – we don’t want to hold you up!”

Mai: “Especially since you seem to have gotten quite close with Saiki, hm Hayasaka? You’re quite friendly with the specced-up gents, hehe.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s awfully similar to what Kurumada said…”)

As the two pairs parted ways, Hayasaka turned to Saiki to see if he had any reaction towards Mai’s comment. Instead, the boy had stepped away to pick up something from the ground.

Hayasaka: (“A handcuff…?”)

However, on closer inspection, Hayasaka realised the metal had been smelted and forcefully widened.

Hayasaka: “That’s strange… I don’t remember if anyone had ever broken out of their handcuff. I wasn’t even aware it was possible…”

Saiki: “ *I thought no one bothered to try after what Monotora said* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but since we’ve all been freed, I’m not sure if we’ll be able to identify who it belongs to, nor did I really keep much track on who had their handcuff on this morning…”

Saiki: “ *Huff. They’ll just have to be identified in the trial* .”

Truth bullet obtained: Burned Handcuff

Saiki placed the handcuff back onto the ground as Hayasaka heard the library’s doors creak open behind them. They left the bookshelves to see Kurumada, Brian and L.

L: “Hello again. I take it you’re ready to lift up the bookshelf?”

Natsuki: “...!”

Natsuki perked up from where she was sitting, but her lips remained sealed.

Kurumada: “Alright – give me a sec here.”

Sizing up the shelf, Kurumada dropped down on one knee as he slid his hands underneath the wood and gripped the edges, heaving it up with a grunt. Once it was back to its vertical position, he promptly let go, causing it to wobble slightly as it found its balance.

Hayasaka: (“...Impressive.”)

Kurumada: “Gah, damn heavy that thing is.”

Brian: “Huh. It doesn’t feel like there’s many books on that shelf.”

Kurumada: “That’s ‘cuz they’re all scattered around the floor, Einstein.”

Hayasaka: “E-Even so, there’s hardly enough books around for a supposedly packed bookshelf.”

L: “You are correct there. Perhaps someone was an avid reader.”

Brian: “Huh…?”

L: “That was a dry joke, I will admit.”

Hayasaka: (“At least it wasn't as bad as my pencil one… Regardless, I wonder if the shelf was always lacking books or not…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Knocked Over Bookshelf

L: “I suppose I’ll be checking the body alone again for now.”

Hayasaka: “...Actually, I’ll do it with you this time.”

Kurumada: “Ya sure? You don’t gotta push yourself or nothin’.”

Hayasaka: “It’s alright. I feel a little more composed than before.” (“And…”)

Hayasaka stole a glance at Natsuki, who was avoiding her sight on Yuri’s exposed body.

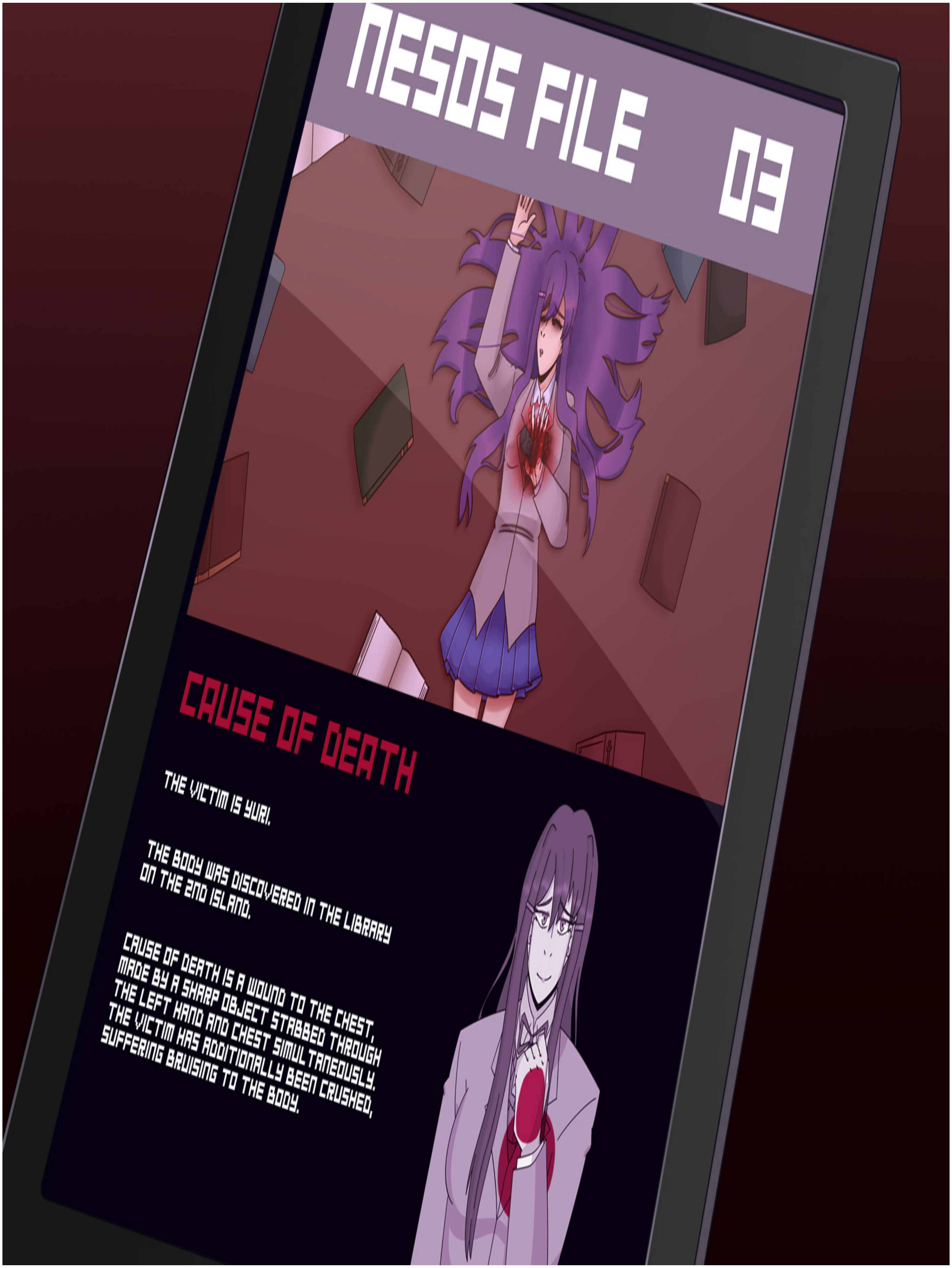
Hayasaka: (“...I feel compelled to do this for Natsuki.”)

But as Hayasaka finally took a glance down at Yuri, he froze.

Hayasaka: (“Oh god… *Oh god* …”)

He took a deep breath to console himself. Before he could move, however, a screen was slid a few ways from his face, turning to see Saiki had provided the Nesos File for him on his own tablet.

Hayasaka: “Ah, thank you, Saiki.”



NESOS FILE 03

CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS YURI.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN THE LIBRARY ON THE 2ND ISLAND.

CAUSE OF DEATH IS A WOUND TO THE CHEST, MADE BY A SHARP OBJECT STABBED THROUGH THE LEFT HAND AND CHEST SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE VICTIM HAS ADDITIONALLY BEEN CRUSHED, SUFFERING BRUISING TO THE BODY.

The victim is Yuri. The body was discovered in the library on the 2nd Island. Cause of death is a wound to the chest, made by a sharp object stabbed through the left hand and chest simultaneously. The victim has additionally been crushed, suffering bruising to the body.

Hayasaka: ("Again, there's no time of death… However, I'm surprised to see her cause of death has been confirmed: a chest wound, huh? It's definitely where most of the red's coming from, h-haha… But, I'm mostly concerned about the 'simultaneous' wound. I suppose there's only one way to find out about it…")

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File #3: Yuri

Hayasaka gave Saiki a nod once he had finished relaying his thoughts on the file, and the other pocketed the tablet. Focusing his attention back onto Yuri's body, he knelt down beside her, making sure not to accidentally sit on any of her locks of hair.

Kurumada: "So, what's first on the agenda?"

Immediately drifting his eyes to her chest wound, he winced.

Hayasaka: "...There's a knife that's been lodged deep into her hand. It's stabbed right through it, actually. But it doesn't stop there: it's even gone through into her chest…"

L: "It's quite the attack, isn't it?"

Brian: "Maybe Yuri placed her hand out to defend herself, but the killer decided to stab right through."

Hayasaka: "I-Isn't that a morbid idea? H-Haha…"

Brian: "Actually, now that I'm hearing myself… Y-Yeah, that is kinda violent…"

Hayasaka: (“Who could’ve stabbed Yuri like that? Right through her hand, no less… I don’t even want to think about it, really.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Yuri’s Hand and Chest Wound

Hayasaka then felt someone lean over his shoulder, holding his breath as they hummed lowly.

Hayasaka: “Uhm–?”

Kurumada: “Oh, uh, sorry. Thought you wouldn’t mind me takin’ a look.”

Hayasaka: “Why? Did something catch your attention?”

Kurumada: “A ‘lil. Ya see that knife? I reckon it’s from the kitchen.”

L: “There aren’t many other locations where we can get access to knives, mind you. Although I suppose someone should check just to make sure.”

Brian: “But why did the killer leave clear evidence of the weapon in Yuri?”

L: “If you stabbed someone in such an unconventional way like that, Brian, would you be able to pull it out?”

Brian: “... *O-Oh* . That was a dumb question, sorry.”

Kurumada: “Heh, he might’ve just said that to throw us off his crime.”

Brian: “I-I-I didn’t kill her! I swear! I-I would never kill anyone!”

Hayasaka: “ *Kurumada* .”

Kurumada: “What? It was just a joke.”

Saiki: “ *Good grief* .”

Hayasaka: (“P-Pushing that aside, this really is such an unconventional way of murder, as L put it. How could this have even happened in the first place…?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Kitchen Knife

One more check over Yuri’s body left Hayasaka ready to call his search concluded. As he attempted to stand up however, Saiki pointed firmly towards her outstretched hand.

Hayasaka: “...Her handcuff’s missing…”

Kurumada: “What d’ya mean? It didn’t fall off like the rest of ‘em?”

L: “If it did, then surely Ena’s would have as well.”

Brian: “Oh, but it was still on their wrist, right?”

Kurumada: “So what the hell happened to it?”

Hayasaka: (“I’m unsure if it has to do with what Saiki and I found earlier – that might be why he pointed it out. For now, however…”)

Picking himself up off of the floor, Hayasaka peered over at Natsuki still sitting at the table.

Hayasaka: “...Are the rest of you going to be long with Yuri?”

L: “We won’t be much longer.”

Brian: “Why do you ask?”

Hayasaka gestured towards the girl as a few of the others nodded in understanding. Excusing himself, he made his way back over to the tables, Saiki noiselessly following along like a shadow.

Jesse: “Got that shelf off her then.”

Hayasaka: “Y-Yes. The others said they won’t be long.”

Jesse: “Do you wanna go over to her now, Natsuki?”

Jesse gently laid his hand on the girl’s shoulder. Natsuki tore her half-lidded, red eyes off of the table and barely made eye contact with him, opting to stare at his chest. After a moment, she shrugged.

Saiki: “ *Did you have any idea of Yuri’s plans prior* ?”

Natsuki: “W-Wha…?”

Eyes snapping fully open, Natsuki stared dazed and a little disturbedly at Saiki as if what he said was something deranged. Even Hayasaka was taken aback at his abruptness. Quickly composing herself, Natsuki shook her head.

Natsuki: “N-No – no I didn’t! Yuri told me nothing this entire time. You–you know that, don’t you?”

Saiki: “...”

Jesse: “I mean, she never really spoke all that clear since she, uh, lost it, if y’know what I mean. Like, no offence and all.”

Natsuki: “I-It’s fine.”

Bojack: “What I want to know is why she even showed up to the stand-up at all. I sure as hell didn’t invite her.”

Jesse: “Me neither, actually.”

Natsuki: “...’Cuz it was me. But, I was confused when she turned up, too. When I invited her, she said she didn’t want to come, even after I told her I was going to be performing…”

Hayasaka: (“I assume Yuri didn’t want to be around the group too much…”)

Natsuki: “But… m-maybe… I had this suspicion over the poem that she performed at the venue last night.”

Hayasaka: “What do you mean…?”

Natsuki: “Me and Yuri – we write poems that have a deeper message underneath the initial words. So–So whatever Yuri was trying to say, that wasn’t random mutterings. It must’ve meant something.”

Hayasaka: “I see… Do you know where Yuri’s poem may be right now?”

Natsuki: “I don’t know… It might be in her room, I guess?”

Hayasaka: (“Right… I may have to check that later.”)

Natsuki: “...That’s all I know. Really.”

Saiki: “ *Then what about Ena* ?”

Natsuki: “H-Huh…?”

Bojack: “Now that you mention her–or them, they were *your* partner for the cuff motive, right? How the hell did they not blow up if they were at the clocktower and you were, uh, where were you last night exactly?”

Natsuki: “I was in my hotel room the entire night. When I ran after Yuri last night, I tried to get her to tell me why she recited that poem, but she kept insisting I didn’t need to worry about it. After a while, I gave up again, and I just stormed off back to the hotel…”

Jesse: “Huh, that’s weird. Maybe there’s somethin’ about those cuffs we weren’t told about.”

Hayasaka: (“I wouldn’t put it past Nesos to withhold information to their advantage…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Natsuki’s Account

Hayasaka: “Ah, we’re sorry for disturbing you once again, Natsuki…”

Natsuki: “N-No, um, you’re not. I’m grateful you want to check up on me, and if anything, I’m being the stubborn one.”

A soft creak rang out as Natsuki stood up from her chair. Curling her fists, she began to walk over towards Yuri.

Jesse: “Yo, Natsuki. Do you want me n’ Bojack to come with you?”

The girl shook her head.

Natsuki: “I want to be alone with her, i-if that’s okay.”

Once out of earshot, Jesse folded his arms on the table.

Jesse: “I’ll keep an eye out for her. You guys can get back to investigatin’.”

Hayasaka nodded, turning to Saiki with a creased brow.

Hayasaka: (“I don’t understand why Saiki was so eager to question Natsuki like that. Perhaps I was being a little slow on my end? I-I don’t think it’s appropriate to pry right now, anyway…”) “Saiki, would you like to go check the kitchen about that knife before we run out of time?”

Confirming with a nod, the two made their way to the entrance. As Hayasaka neared the door, he made contact with an unsteady object that promptly rolled out from under his shoe. He unsuccessfully scrambled to pick it up, only to be saved the embarrassing attempt by Saiki who stopped the object with his shoe. Clearing his throat, he grabbed it before the awkwardness could consume him.

Hayasaka: “T-Thank you, erm… Ah, this is a bottle of… anaesthetic? What’s that doing here?” (“At least I know it’s probably from the pharmacy. But still, by the entrance to the library no less is odd to say the least. Next time I should really watch where I’m walking, haha…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bottle of Anaesthetic

Carefully placing the bottle back down in a place he was sure no one else would succumb to tripping over it, the two finally left the library for their trek to the hotel. As they arrived on the first island and passed the park, however, Hayasaka felt his second presence no longer beside him, turning to see Saiki had halted mid-walk.

Hayasaka: “What’s wrong…?”

The other held a reply, creeping over towards a nearby park tree.

Saiki: “ *Come over here* .”

Cocking a brow, Hayasaka followed suit. As he inspected the trunk, a faint marking stood out to him.

Hayasaka: “That’s odd… It almost looks like something was tied here.”

And then he remembered it. The bag of mutilated bodies stacked up upon each other. The one so carelessly dropped to the ground by Monotora on their first awakening on the island. Needless to say, a cold sweat trickled down his neck, sending his nerves on end.

Hayasaka: “ *A-Ah…* ”

Saiki had turned to him with a concerned look, forcing Hayasaka to quickly shake his head.

Hayasaka: “D-Don’t worry, I’m fine. I just had a bad memory, is all. We should keep a note of this, just in case.”

The boy retained a firm look on him for a moment longer, before dropping the subject.

Truth bullet obtained: Marks Around Park Tree

Thankfully there were no more pit stops as they arrived at the hotel’s kitchen. They split up to scan around in the search for any missing knives, Hayasaka finding an empty holder in the knife rack.

Hayasaka: “I think it’s safe to say the knife we found in Yuri is a kitchen knife…”

Saiki nodded from the opposite counter. Satisfied he had no more business in the kitchen, Hayasaka made his way to the entrance. Just as he was about to take another step–

Saiki: “ *Stop walking* .”

Hayasaka froze mid-step, one foot hovering in the air that trembled slightly due to his off-put balance.

Hayasaka: “W-What’s wrong now?”

Saiki stepped over to him, reaching down under where his loafer casted a shadow onto the tiles and pinched a small berry off the floor.

Saiki: “ *You were about to step on this* .”

Half-disappointed at the anti-climatic reveal, he finally set his foot back on the floor.

Hayasaka: “I-I suppose it would be a little unpleasant if I got my shoe dirty…”

Hayasaka held onto his chuckle as he noticed how intently Saiki was studying the small berry. Leaning over, he decided to take a look for himself.

Hayasaka: ("Come to think of it, the colour's a little strange… I can't recall many orange-red berries being a very popular snack, haha…") "Do you have any idea what this berry is, Saiki?"

Saiki: " *Nope* ."

Hayasaka: "Mm, then I suppose we'll just have to try and identify it later. Perhaps the library may have a book on something like this, hopefully."

Saiki: " *I'll keep a hold of it then* ."

Saiki let the berry roll onto his palm as he gently closed his fingers around it.

Hayasaka: "Seeing that we're here at the hotel, we should look inside Yuri's room to see if we can find her poem…"

With the new goal in mind, the two navigated up stairs to the girl in question's hotel room.

Hayasaka: ("Ah, this may be more difficult than I assumed. I've never checked someone else's room before, especially not someone who's recently died…")

But as he went to try the door handle, he was taken aback to find it had opened without much of a struggle against his grip.

Hayasaka: ("What the…? Is this Nesos' doing, or did Yuri leave her door unlocked…?")

Realising it was pointless to dwell on such a question, he and Saiki stepped inside. The interior wasn't much different from Hayasaka's own, save from a few book stacks and tea cups lying against her bed. He could almost pick up a faint whiff of lavender, unsure if she had left the scent herself or if he had unconsciously decided to associate it with her. It wasn't trashed, it wasn't abnormal, it definitely didn't reflect malice. It was just… Yuri.

Saiki: " *Hayasaka* ."

Snapped out of his daze, Hayasaka shot his eyes towards the pink-haired boy who was standing in front of the table. Rubbing the back of his neck, he approached to see a sheet of paper on the top.

Hayasaka: “This is… Yuri’s poem.” (“Natsuki said there’s usually a meaning underneath her words. Let’s see if I can decipher anything upon a more focused read…”)

'I’m staring down the endless stairs of fate.

There is no noise in the dead of the night; the moon rises perfectly above my empty head.

It glows softly on my cheeks.

I feel like a saviour tonight.

Catching the sight of my beloved, her frail legs step into the blue moonlight.

But she drips red.

Like a waterfall she sheds a rusty liquid.

Slowly, slowly, out of her open mouth.

She screams to me. But it’s like a melody replaying in my head.

I am calm.

I am alive.

I watch as she falls back onto the shiny mattress.

Her eyes close softly.

She smiles.

I smile back.

Although she can never open her eyes again, I know her true feelings.

The chime strikes the fateful hour.

The Devil's number doubled.

I wish I was only there sooner.'

Still, upon the second reading, Hayasaka was left mostly at a blank.

Hayasaka: ("I… feel like I understand it more, but at the same time, I feel like I don't understand any of it at all. It definitely reflects the writing style she had when we wrote that poem altogether at the book club a while ago. Regardless, this has to be a message towards something, right? Perhaps it's about the murder, seeing how morbid it is…") "...Do you have any ideas on its meaning, Saiki?"

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "...S-Same boat, then. I'll keep a hold of her poem. Perhaps we can have another crack at it in the trial with everyone else."

Truth bullet obtained: Yuri's Poem

Seeing there was no longer any need to be at the hotel, the two made their way back to the library at a brisk pace, minding they probably didn't have a lot of time left on their hands. The air felt more peaceful than it did before, although as Hayasaka noticed Natsuki sat on her knees beside Yuri's body, muttering to her, he felt a bittersweet tug at his chest.

Brian: "Ah, hey guys."

Hayasaka: "Oh, Brian. You're not investigating with L anymore?"

Brian: " *Sigh* , thankfully he let me off my 'leash', so to speak. Where'd you two go?"

Hayasaka: "We've just been to the hotel to look for some extra clues. Speaking of which, do you have any idea on where we may find a book on plant types, perhaps?"

Brian: “Oh! Funny you mention that – I was doing a little digging into the flora of the island when we first got access to the library. I didn’t really want to sit around and do nothing, I guess.”

Hayasaka: “Hm. That’s a lucky coincidence, haha.”

Brian: “Here, um, follow me.”

Brian then led them further into the library to a certain set of bookshelves.

Brian: “So, what exactly are you looking for?”

At the prompt, Saiki lifted his enclosed fist and displayed the berry sitting in his palm once again.

Hayasaka: “Something to do with identifying this berry, if possible.”

Brian adjusted his glasses, running a finger across a set of book spines before hesitantly pulling out a pine green book. Hayasaka and Saiki waited in anticipation as Brian flicked through the pages, face growing slightly nervous with the silence that grew with his search. Eventually he stopped on a page with an eased face.

Brian: “Is this what you’re looking for?”

Holding up the double spread for them to see, Hayasaka read the heading: *Strychnos nux-vomica* .

Hayasaka: “Strychnine berries…?”

Saiki held up the berry in comparison to the image displayed on the page, and nodded.

Brian: “So, it says here that–”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Hold it right there, scumbags! Times up – and I’ve sure as hell given ya plenty of time to look over both bodies, so don’t go cryin’ to me that you ain’t ready yet! Now then, head over to Nesos Park on the first island for the next round of bloodshed, kehehe!”

Following the sign off from the announcement, Brian sulked under his breath.

Brian: “I feel like they did that on purpose…”

Hayasaka: “What should we do about the book?”

Brian: “I’ll keep it in my briefcase for the time being, if you’d like.”

Hayasaka: (“Even though we’ve identified the name of the berry, there’s still a lot of mystery surrounding it. For now, I’ll put it on the backburner.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Strychnine Berry

Kurumada: “There ya are.”

Hayasaka noticed Kurumada turn a corner in their direction and approached them.

Kurumada: “Ready to get goin’?”

Glancing over at Saiki for a moment, the boy returned a nod and the four left for the park. However, just like before, the dwindling numbers only rooted his nerves ever further. From 16 to 10: over a third of the original group gone. He was sunk into the death game deeper than he could ever imagine. Just how far would it go?

Latte: “Hey, Natsuki, how’re you doing? I saw you went to talk to Yuri. What did you speak about with her?”

Natsuki: “Um… I-I tried to say goodbye to her, but I couldn’t find the right words to say. Even if she was quiet, I knew she was listening to me, b-but… can she even hear me now? What was even the point…?”

Latte: “Yuri will always be listening to you, Natsuki, just as she did before. I promise you that.”

Rubbing her eyes from welling up again, Natsuki quietly nodded.

Monotora: “Ahahaha!”

Without warning, Monotora pounced up onto the fountain edge, their off-putting laugh echoing throughout the park.

Monotora: “Seriously? You really tryin’ to talk to a damn corpse of all things made my day! What’s next, ya gonna start chattin’ up these statues too?”

Natsuki: “N-Ngh!”

Mai: “Leave her alone, you nasty thing.”

Kurumada: “Damn, Mai.”

Monotora: “Y’know, I have a mind to rip you all to pieces from that comment alone, *missy* . Too bad I have to refrain myself for the trial, eh? You’re lucky bastards.”

Leaping off of the fountain, Monotora landed dead-on the tile that opened up the pathway to the elevator. Hayasaka swore the quake felt more intense than before – whether from the tense atmosphere or the lack of people, he didn’t know.

Monotora: “C’mon now. You’d hate to keep me waitin’, eh?”

Disappearing, the group were left with only one choice.

L: “Do we have permission to rip this case on your friend apart, Natsuki?”

Mildly startled by the question, Natsuki took a moment before nodding.

Natsuki: “B-But I don’t want to do it just for Yuri. I only knew Ena for a short time, but they helped me consider my feelings a little more…”

Latte: “How considerate of you, Natsuki…”

Mai: “Ena was always the interesting type, weren’t they? It’s sad to see them go so soon…”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, speaking of Ena…”) “Apologies for cutting in, but has anyone seen Moony since they died?”

Jesse: “Y’mean that lil’ moon thing that followed ‘em around? I don’t think I have.”

Bojack: “Don’t tell me this is a triple murder.”

Brian: “I-I don’t think so? She wasn’t with Ena at the clocktower…”

Kurumada: “It’s a bit late to start a search party for her, anyhow.”

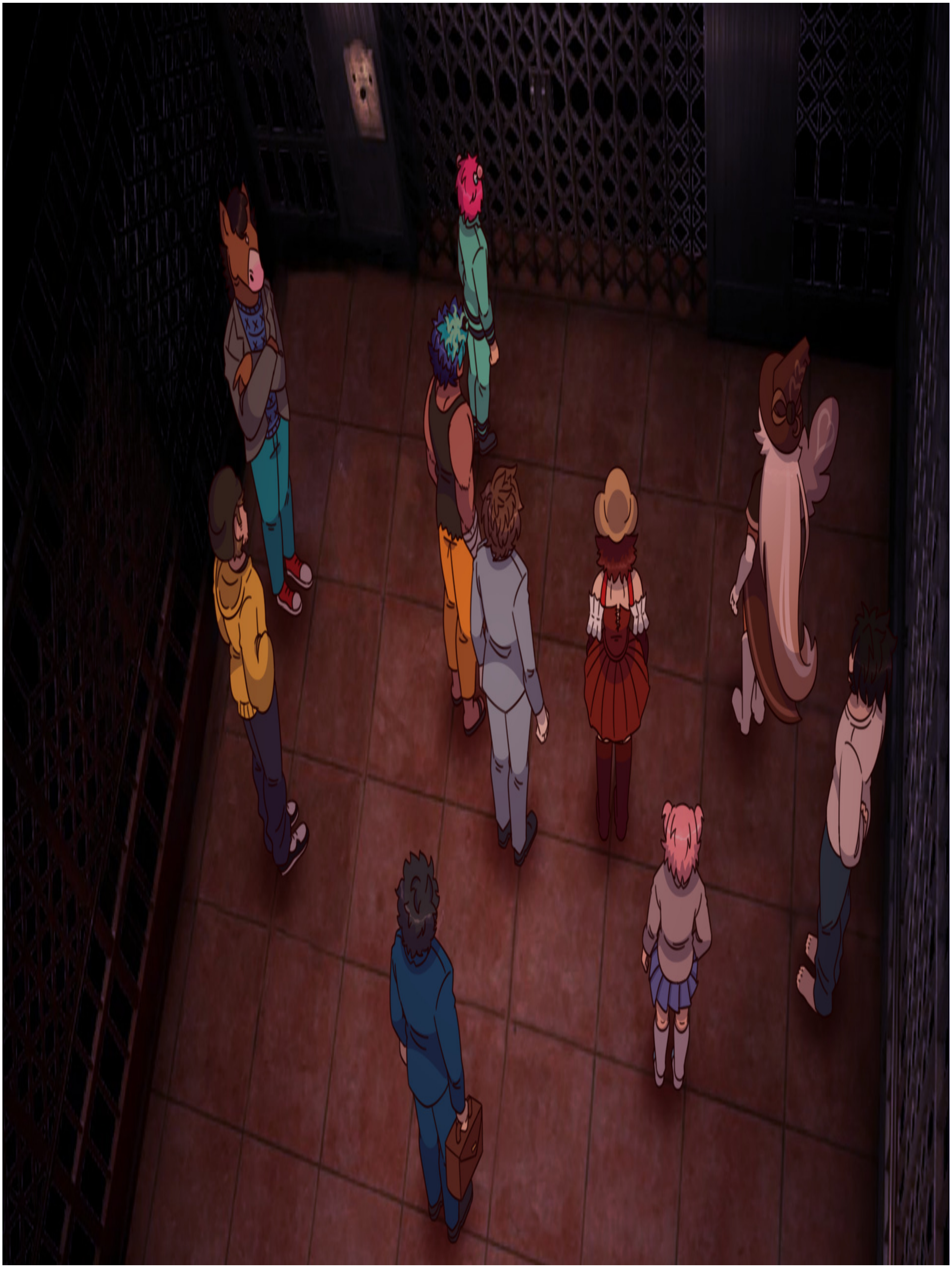
L: “Considering Monotora does not seem too concerned on her current whereabouts, it’s safe to assume she’s not majorly tied to the case.”

Hayasaka: (“Still, it’s concerning that she hasn’t been found yet. I can only hope she turns up somewhere soon…”)

As the group began to begrudgingly make their way down to the elevator for the third time, Hayasaka noticed how Saiki trailed close behind him, keeping his own personal distance for his usual reserved reasons. Nonetheless, it gave Hayasaka a short lived smile of reassurance.

Hayasaka: (“In a way, I’m a little glad he stands beside me in the trial room. I don’t really want to leave his side all that much myself right now…”)

Stepping onto the elevator together, it wasn’t long until the metal doors bolted together for the mechanism to kick into its deep descension underground.

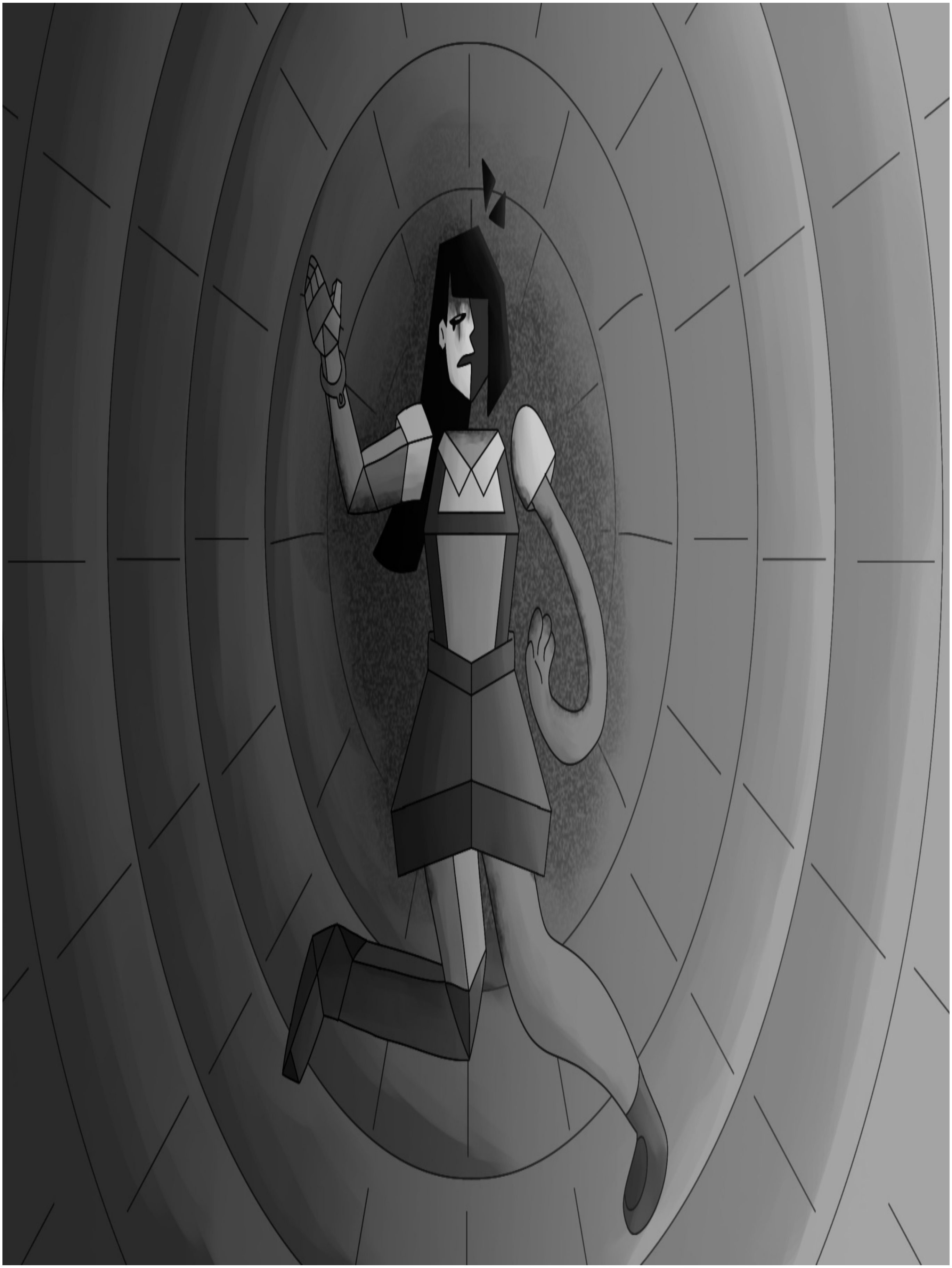


This time, it was quieter in the elevator. Aside from the clanging and clanking of the metal as it sped past the walls, Hayasaka was unsure if he could even hear his own breathing. It was as if everyone was holding their breaths – one wrong move and they were sure to be led to the same fate as their companions from before. Watching the two boys die in such brutal, vicious ways before wasn't something anyone desired to see again, and yet no one knew what was in store next.

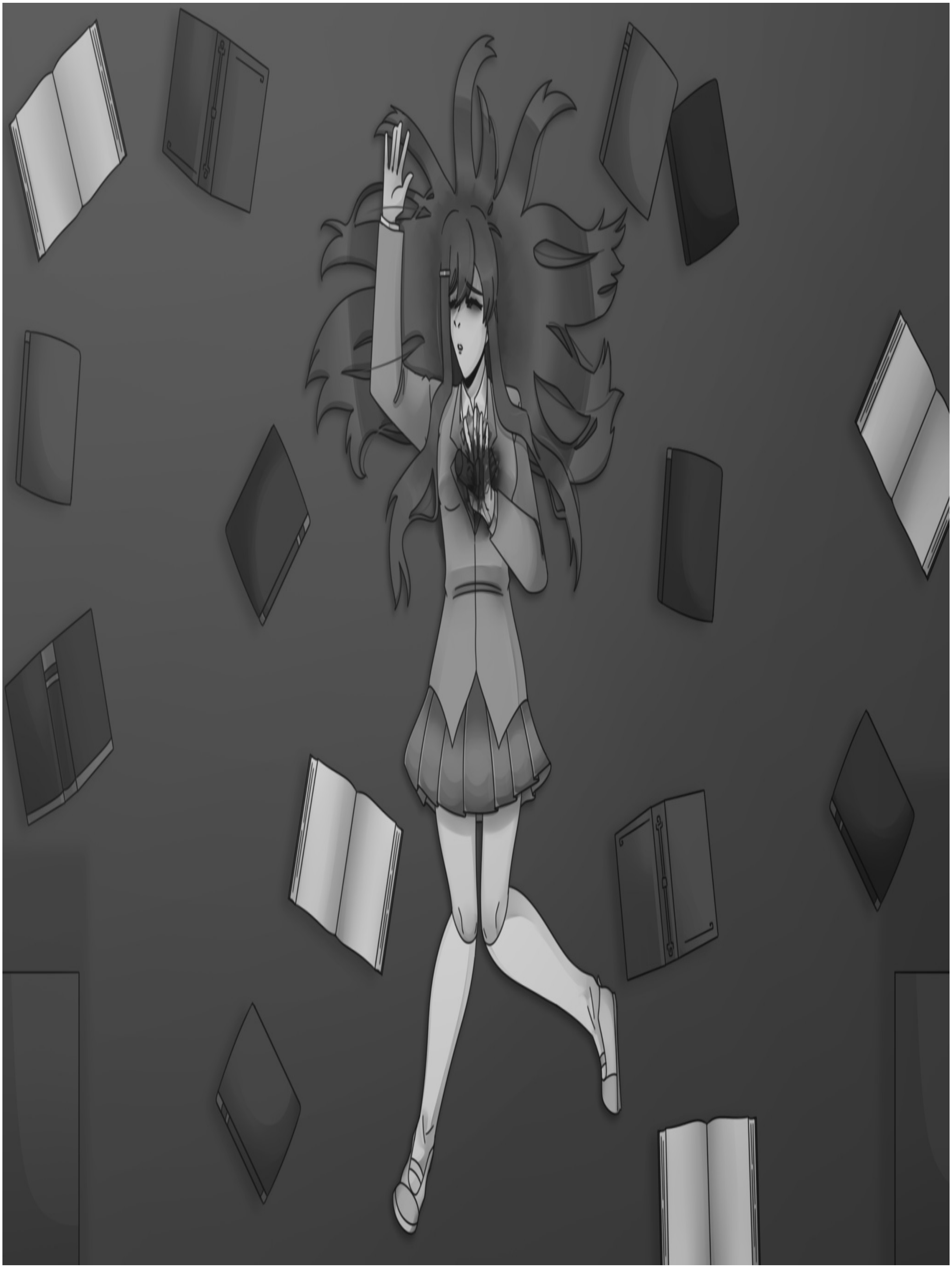
One thing Hayasaka noticed, however, was a faint sense of determination that resonated throughout the group. A determination he could say he shared merit in: the want to help Natsuki solve the deaths of her friends.

Even Monotora was quiet despite their spiteful demeanour just a while ago as they finally arrived at the trial room. They were picking and chewing at some sort of meat, the fleshy squelches as they chowed down invaded Hayasaka's ears like a parasite. He tried to overcome it, however, as he walked to his podium. That was when he finally realised Saiki's lack of earphones: he hadn't been wearing them at all this whole day. Although a spot of white poked out from his pocket, he didn't look as if he was planning to retrieve it any time soon.

Hayasaka: ("The room's changed colour again… Despite the bright tones, I can't help but feel even worse each time I think back on their deaths…")

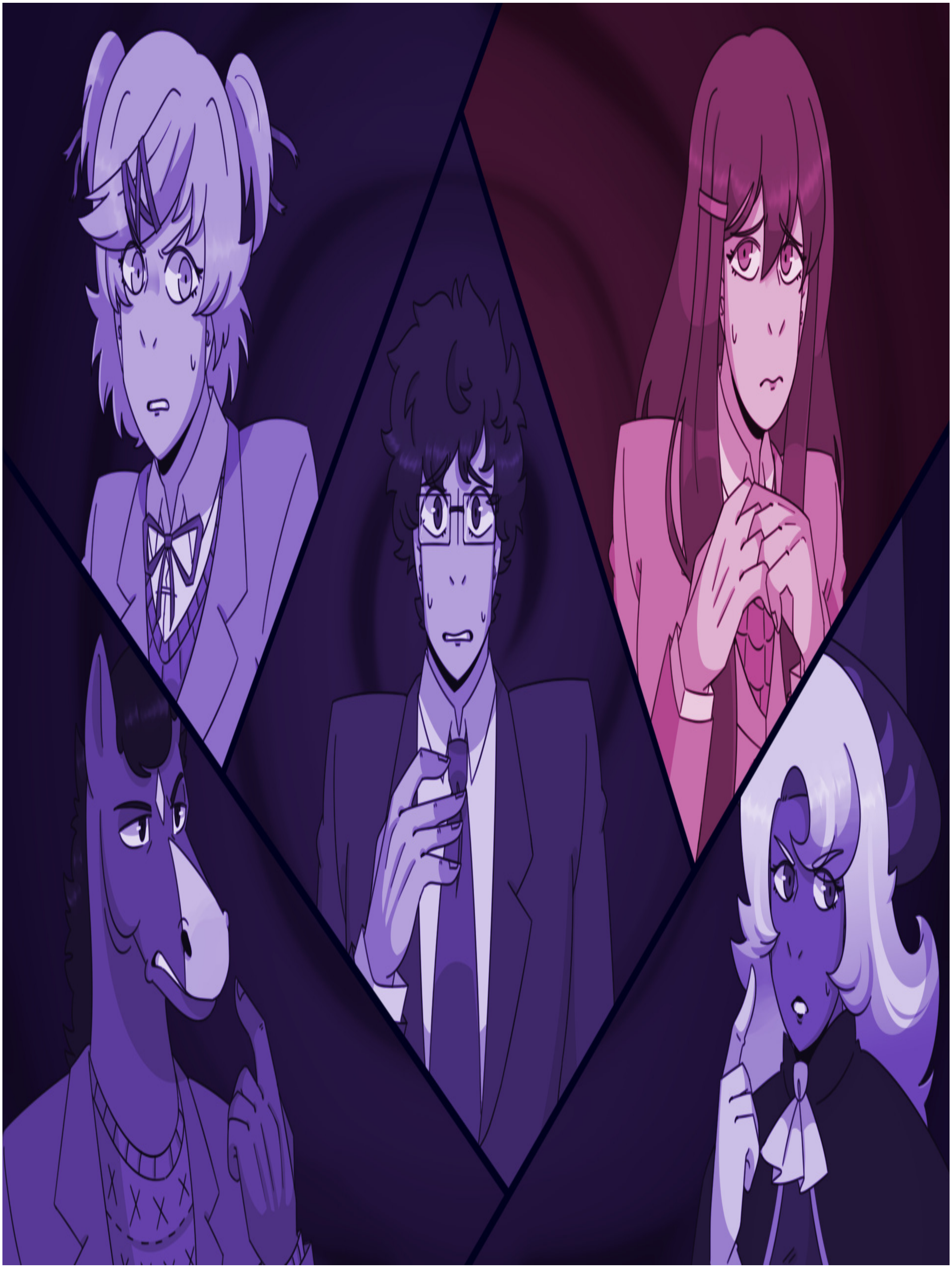


Hayasaka: (“Ena… They never deserved what happened to them. I hardly knew them, and, hah, it’s not like I ever hardly understood what they said most of the time, but… they didn’t deserve to die. Not at all. And to die alongside Yuri of all people…”)

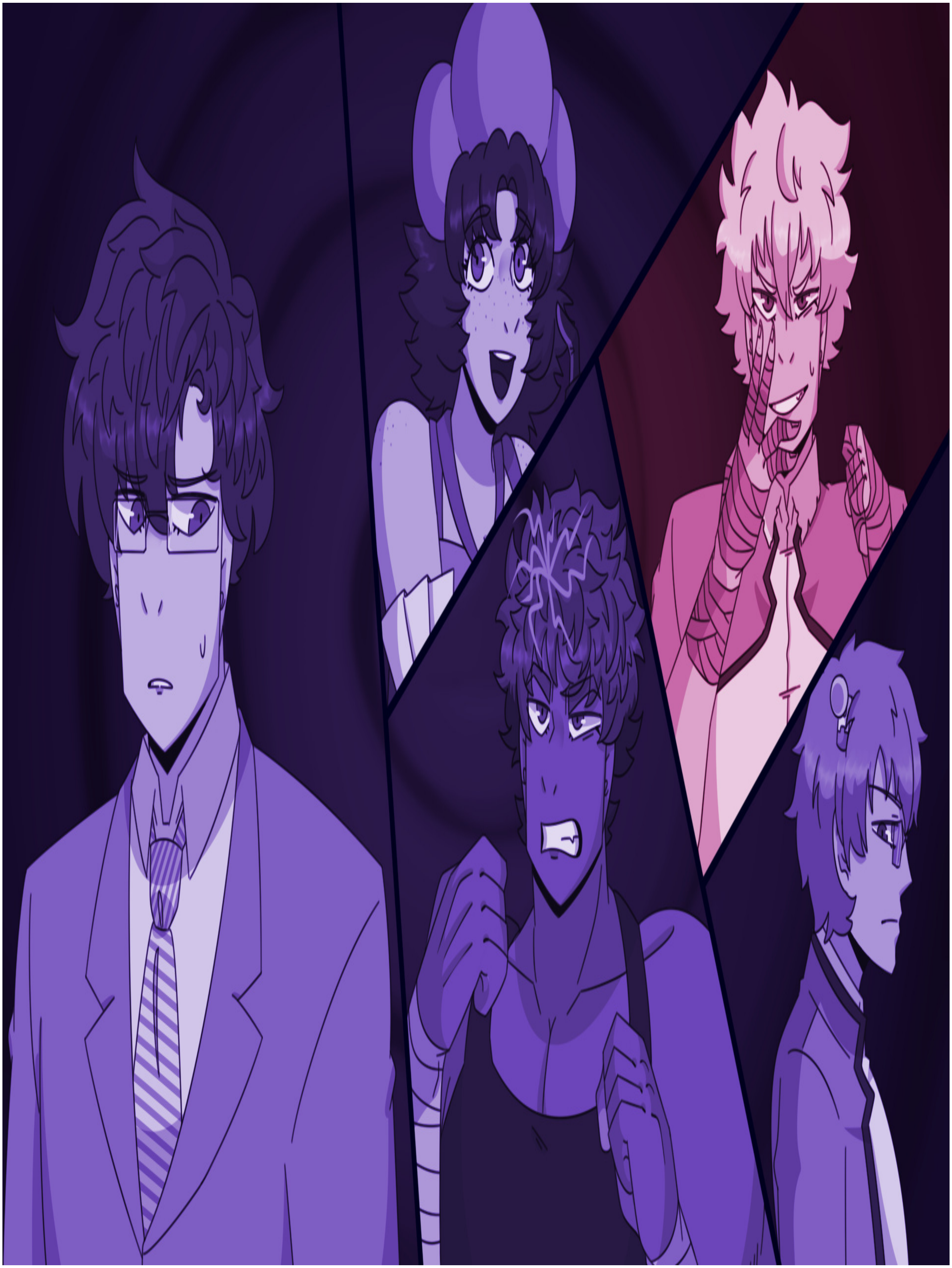


Hayasaka: (“I wonder if Yuri didn’t mind her outcome…? No, no, even if she did, even if she didn’t, her pained face is just too much to even try to comprehend what she wanted in the end… Ultimately, her plans to kill us all failed, but…”)

Hayasaka: (“Who killed her? Who killed Ena? Who could be capable of killing two people like that?”)



Hayasaka: (“Are the cases connected? Are there multiple killers? Is there something we all haven’t realised yet?”)



Hayasaka: ("You'd think it'd get easier the more we did this, but if anything, it feels harder to move on. Did fate bring us here? Or… Does this go deeper than that?")

Despite all his fruitless questions, *that* singular thought arose in Hayasaka once again.

The third executive trial had begun .

Chapter End Notes

> Now we lead into the third case of the fic... I wonder who did dun it? Do you have any theories? Do you not care and would rather wait for the trial? I wouldn't blame ya both ways are fun lol
> It was a lot of fun writing Hayasaka and Saiki's dynamic during this investigation tho
> Hayasaka: so what did you think of this particular thing Saiki
> Saiki: ...
> Hayasaka: yeah me too

Chapter 3: Chained to the Grief (Executive Trial)

Chapter Notes

> And as summer comes to a close, summer never truly ends on Island Nesos! ...Unfortunately.
> Anyway, we all know what time it is! Pain and suffering and agony and never ending despair-
> Word count this time around's 23k, but hey.......... we like words don't we
> Let's not waste anymore time and figure out who be commitin' those crimes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The so-called 'double whammy' slams down onto the group as the mysterious case of the double victims sends everyone into confusion. The absurd likelihood of Ena's death paired with the unanticipated departure of Yuri seems to make no sense at all. What happened in the clocktower? What happened in the library? And who was the one behind it all?

TRUTH BULLETS

NESOS FILE 3: ENA

The victim is Ena. The body was discovered in the clocktower on the 3rd Island. The victim has no external injuries, apart from blunt force applied to the cranium and additional broken bones around the arms and legs.

NESOS FILE 3: YURI

The victim is Yuri. The body was discovered in the library on the 2nd Island. Cause of death is a wound to the chest, made by a sharp object stabbed through the left hand and chest simultaneously. The victim has additionally been crushed, suffering bruising to the body.

KNOCKED OVER BOOKSHELF

The bookshelf toppled over on Yuri. It's worth noting how hardly any books are present unlike the fully packed bookshelves adjacent either side.

YURI'S HAND AND CHEST WOUND

A knife has been lodged so deep into Yuri's left hand that it has simultaneously sliced through into her chest. It is uncertain how such a wound came to be.

KITCHEN KNIFE

The knife lodged in Yuri. It has been confirmed to have been taken from the kitchen. Due to the toppled bookshelf, this may be the reason the weapon was not retrieved from her body.

MARKS ON TABLE

In the library, there are a multitude of shallow scratch marks present on one of the reading tables. It is uncertain where they originated from, but implies there were signs of a struggle.

PILE OF BURNT BOOKS

Further into the library there is a pile of books that have been burned. It has been theorised something had attempted to be burned, but it's unclear what.

TOOLBOX

Behind the pile of burnt books is a toolbox presumably taken from the supermarket. Noteworthy items inside include a hammer with a dark mark on the head and a box of matches.

ANAESTHETIC BOTTLE

A bottle of anaesthetic was found near the entrance of the library. It has been identified to be taken from the pharmacy.

BURNED HANDCUFF

A handcuff was found in the library to have been forcefully smelted and broken open. As no one had ever publicly attempted to break out of their handcuff before, nor much attention had been paid to who wasn't wearing their handcuff this morning, it's uncertain who it belonged to.

ENA'S CRACKED SKULL AND BROKEN BONES

There is a large crack on the back of Ena's skull opposite the floor. As well as this, most of their bones seem to have been dislocated and/or twisted. Although Ena was a flexible person, it has been noted how extreme their body's condition is.

ENA’S FACE POST-MORTEM

Ena’s face has been noted to be half-white with a large frown, which is most commonly known as their ‘sad state’. It is uncertain if this change in state was from the murder alone or another factor entirely.

BLACK STRAND OF HAIR

A long black strand of hair was found curled around the railing at the top of the clocktower.

MARKS AROUND PARK TREE

Strange marks were found wrapped around a tree at Nesos Park, as if something had been tied there previously.

STRYCHNINE BERRY

A small red-orange berry was found on the floor of the kitchen. It has been identified as a strychnine berry from the Strychnos nux-vomica plant.

YURI’S POEM

The poem Yuri presented at the stand-up event the night prior. It was confirmed by Natsuki that her poems always have a deeper message underneath the initial wording.

JESSE’S ACCOUNT

Jesse and Bojack were at the woodworking shop on the 3rd island from after the stand-up event until 12:30A.M. As they were walking back to the hotel, Jesse claims to have heard mumbling coming from the clocktower but dismissed it.

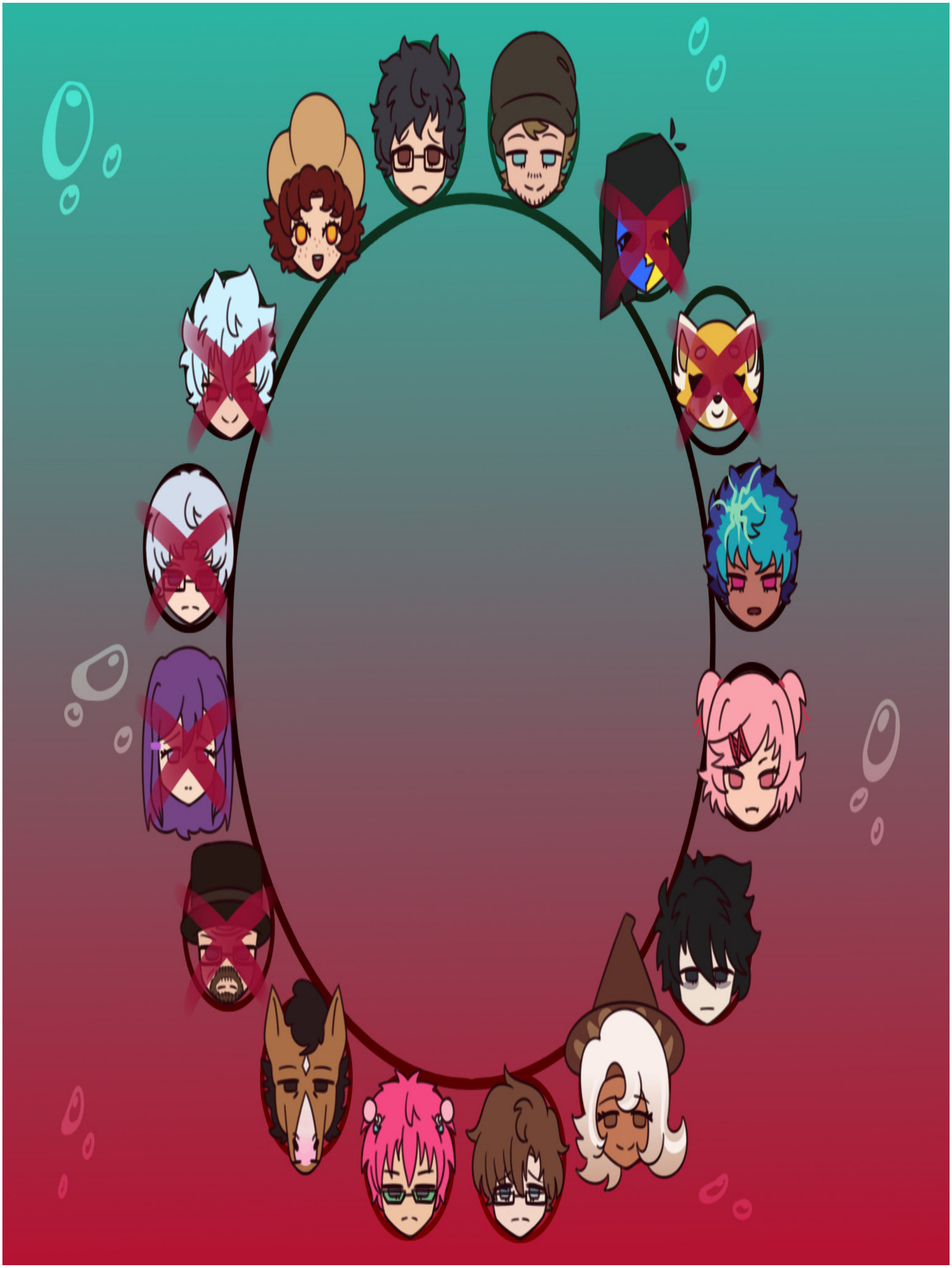
NATSUKI’S ACCOUNT

Natsuki claims to have no idea on any of Yuri’s plans prior; despite inviting her to the stand-up event initially, Yuri had refused only to show up much to her shock. She also claims to have stayed in her hotel room the entire night. She is unsure how Ena was able to go as far as the 3rd island without their handcuff exploding.

LATTE’S ACCOUNT

Latte received a message from Yuri on her tablet asking to come to the library at 11:30PM. When Latte arrived however, she unexpectedly blacked out and woke up the next day only to witness Yuri’s body underneath the bookcase. She ran out to call for help, only to stumble upon L and Brian.

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: ALL RISE!



Monotora: " ...*Gulp* ! Man, that sure was a fresh load'a meat! Anywho, third time's the charm down here, eh? Surely at this point you're startin' to understand the basics of the trial, so I'll just speed through 'em this time: talk about the murder, point fingers at the suspicious shits, and vote for 'em to die! Haha, that's a way more fun explanation actually!"

Brian: "I sort of feel like you didn't need to explain it that way at all…"

Monotora: "Aw, poor Brian doesn't like it when I talk. Let's say we wrap this trial up and kill him instead? Hell, there's a one in ten chance he's the killer, anyway!"

Brian: "N-N-No!"

L: "I think it's wise to ignore Monotora for now unless we require their assistance later on."

Jesse: "So like, where do we start here? You know, seein' we've got two deaths to deal with."

Natsuki: "..."

Kurumada: "Hell, it ain't just the deaths themselves: didn't ya say there wasn't a time of death in the file, Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: "Ah, y-yes. The time of death for both Ena and Yuri hasn't been recorded…"

Mai: "Oh my, isn't that odd? Did Nesos forget to write it down?"

Monotora: "Kehehe!"

L: "I'm certain they are fully aware of when each victim died. For us, however, it'll be an integral part to figuring out the case."

Latte: “But then, who’s case should we discuss first? Both are equally as important to me.”

Bojack: “Why don’t we flip a coin on it? I found this weird bronze coin while I was in the restaurant this one time and–Oh. OK, both sides are the same. Well, there goes that idea.”

Jesse: “...I say we go for Ena first. You alright with that, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “...Yeah.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, he must’ve suggested that for Natsuki’s sake. She doesn’t appear all that ready to talk about Yuri yet…”)

Latte: “Oh, I don’t believe I actually got to see Ena’s body in person. Can someone clarify what happened to them?”

Bojack: “Me neither. I mean I took a look at the file, but you can’t even zoom in on the image or anything.”

L: “You do bring up a valid point, however. Let’s begin by discussing Ena’s cause of death.”

Mai: “Thinking caps on, everyone~!”

Hayasaka: (“How Ena died… I suppose it’s something we’d eventually have to face.”)

NONSTOP-DEBATE

Brian: “Ena’s cause of death… Well, it wasn’t stated in the file again – a-although I suppose we should’ve expected that by now…”

Kurumada: “A blow to the back of the head n’ a bunch of dislocated bones – that’s what Mr. Detective found.”

Jesse: “Sounds like one hell of an attack.”

L: “An attack sounds unlikely – there were no weapons identified at the scene.”

Natsuki: “Huh? That’s not helpful at all! A-Are you saying you don’t know how Ena died?”

Saiki: “ *Or **they had simply fallen** from a high place.* ”

Bojack: “Oh shit – I almost forgot you were here.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...Despite the fact he’s standing right next to you? N-Nevermind, that’s not the important part here. What’s important is that I think I agree…”)

ENA’S CRACKED SKULL AND BROKEN BONES

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I believe Saiki’s right. The impact from hitting the ground must be why Ena’s head wound is right opposite the floor.”

Latte: “But where did they fall from?”

L: “To create such a fatal impact, the most logical place to assume is from the top of the clocktower.”

Brian: “I-It was pretty high up after all…”

Bojack: “And how do we know Ena was even up there in the first place?”

Hayasaka: (“Fortunately, I think I found something that proves their appearance…”)

BLACK STRAND OF HAIR

Hayasaka: “There was a black strand of hair Saiki and I found atop the railing in the clocktower. I believe it must be Ena’s.”

Bojack: “You never know: it could be Ryan’s.”

Brian: “Um, are you talking about me…?”

Jesse: “Yeah, or it could be Bojack’s.”

Bojack: “Alright, you don’t need to spite me.”

Saiki: “ *It’s too long to be either of theirs, anyway. Look.* ”

Hayasaka: (“Huh? Saiki kept the hair with him too…? That’s rather diligent of him.”)

L: “This should confirm that Ena did indeed fall from the top of the clocktower.”

Natsuki: “Are–are you serious? How?”

Kurumada: “Don’t tell me they tripped off the edge or somethin’.”

Mai: “What makes you say that?”

Kurumada: “They only found Ena’s hair at the top of the clock tower. That means they must’ve been alone, right?”

Mai: “Not necessarily. Evidence of Ena’s presence didn’t need to be removed, but for a potential killer, there’s a possibility their appearance had been cleaned up, don’t you think?”

Latte: “Oh, that’s very smart, Mai!”

Kurumada: “...Shit. That actually kinda makes more sense.”

Mai: “Aw, don’t worry, Kurumada. Your presence here is a good motivator for us!”

Kurumada: “What’s that s’posed to mean?!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear…”)

L: “This certainly was no accident. The culprit’s intention from the start is clear: they pushed Ena off the top of the clock tower.”

Jesse: “Jesus! For real?”

Natsuki: “T-Thats…”

L: “But it does indeed beg the question as to why and how Ena was present at the clock tower initially, and how the culprit managed to take advantage of the situation.”

Bojack: “I don’t see the clock tower being that interesting for anyone. I mean, you can literally look at the time on the tablets.”

Brian: “Maybe the killer lured Ena there somehow?”

Latte: “That gives me an idea: what if the killer wrote a note to Ena asking them to come to the clock tower?”

Kurumada: “That’d be one hell of a suspicious note.”

L: “And more or less unlikely, as no note was found on their person.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah… Perhaps it wasn’t a private message, but one displayed to everyone publicly.”)

YURI’S POEM

Hayasaka: “What if the message was inside Yuri’s poem…?”

Kurumada: “Eh? Ya mean that freaky shit she interrupted the venue with?”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, um, Natsuki, you said there’s usually a hidden meaning contained within her poems, right?”

Natsuki: “M-Mhm…”

Brian: “Oh, so you think that maybe her poem was a message to someone like Ena?”

Hayasaka: “It’s certainly a possibility, right? Haha…”

Jesse: “If none of us could’a understood Yuri’s poem, what makes you think Ena of all people did?”

Bojack: “She did hit us with it out of nowhere. And right in the middle of my stand-up act – which I still stand by that she should’ve at least waited until I was finished.”

Saiki: “ *I really don’t think that even matters anymore* .”

Latte: “Oh, but I’d think Ena would be perfect for figuring out metaphorical things like that! Remember when they and Yuri exchanged that prose?”

FLASHBACK

Ena: “It is a long way down the rabbit hole, and you won’t be able to come back up to breathe once you make it to wonderland!”

Yuri: “Such a lovely prose… One I can definitely agree upon.”

FLASHBACK END

L: “Alongside that, I don’t believe you’d need to spend too much time with Ena to figure out how differently they process language. It’s definitely possible they deciphered Yuri’s poem rather quickly after she had recited it.”

Natsuki: “How did you even remember that, Latte?”

Latte: “Ah, I guess I like to pick up on the little things about students!”

Saiki: “ *But Ena wasn’t even a student …*”

Mai: “Perhaps there *is* a message hidden in the poem somewhere then! Shall we read it again to see if it helps?”

Brian: “Erm, do we even have the poem?”

Hayasaka: “Haha… I-I actually have it right here. I found it in Yuri’s room.”

Bojack: “I can’t believe you actually went inside *her* room of all people. OK, hang on, was it covered in freaky carved rambles in the walls? How about letters ripped from books to create a ransom-type message?”

Hayasaka: “N-No… It was a rather normal room.”

Natsuki: “Of course it was! God, do you think Yuri would trash her own room?!”

Bojack: “Christ, I was just joking. Mostly.”

L: “Moving on… Mind if I see that poem then, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, here…”

‘I’m staring down the endless stairs of fate.

There is no noise in the dead of the night; the moon rises perfectly above my empty head.

It glows softly on my cheeks.

I feel like a saviour tonight.

Catching the sight of my beloved, her frail legs step into the blue moonlight.

But she drips red.

Like a waterfall she sheds a rusty liquid.

Slowly, slowly, out of her open mouth.

She screams to me. But it's like a melody replaying in my head.

I am calm.

I am alive.

I watch as she falls back onto the shiny mattress.

Her eyes close softly.

She smiles.

I smile back.

Although she can never open her eyes again, I know her true feelings.

The chime strikes the fateful hour.

The Devil's number doubled.

I wish I was only there sooner.'

Kurumada: "...Yeah, I'm gonna be honest. I still have no fuckin' clue what it means."

L: "Then I propose we break it down by paragraph. That way, we only have to focus on one chunk at a time."

Latte: "That's a similar technique I use with my students when they're having a hard time processing a lot of information at once!"

Jesse: "I wasn't expectin' a damn English lesson today."

Bojack: “Then you should probably pay attention, Todd 2.”

Jesse: “Fuck you! I already know what the first part means!”

Brian: “Y-You do?”

Jesse: “Well it’s gotta be somethin’ with stairs, yeah?”

Mai: “‘I’m staring down the endless stairs of fate’... It does make it seem rather high up, doesn’t it?”

Natsuki: “H-Hey, isn’t that similar to the clocktower?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you’re right. It did have a rather long spiral staircase.”

Kurumada: “Well, I guess that confirms the location.”

L: “We can also see that apart from the obvious mention of it being nighttime, the position of the moon tells us this is taking place quite late at night.”

Saiki: “ *It must’ve been inviting Ena to the clocktower* .”

Bojack: “So are we just going to ignore the last line? Y’know, the whole ‘saviour’ thing?”

Brian: “Oh yeah, that is strange. How come Yuri’s calling herself a saviour?”

Kurumada: “Considering she wanted us all dead, I don’t think she was plannin’ on saving anyone anytime soon.”

L: “Wasting time on a single line won’t further us. I say we move on for now and come back once we make the connection later on.”

Mai: “Hm… looks like a new character has been introduced in the second paragraph – somebody’s ‘beloved’.”

Latte: “Do you think it’s referring to Ena?”

Hayasaka: “I’m unsure if that’s the case. This person’s described to have ‘frail legs’... If anything, I’d suspect that means someone smaller.”

Jesse: “And it’s gotta be a girl, I mean, it’s usin’ ‘she’ n’ shit.”

Kurumada: “Then who the hell could it be?”

Hayasaka: (“From what we’ve gathered of the description of this character, there’s only one person that it could be referring to.”) “...I believe this character is Natsuki.”

Natsuki: “Huh? M-Me? Wait – why would I be in Yuri’s poem?”

L: “I have to wonder the same. After all, what’s been written of you isn’t very pleasant.”

Natsuki: “W-What’re you talking about?”

Mai: “Oh dear… It’s because the beloved dies, doesn’t she?”

Kurumada: “Where the hell did *that* come from?!”

Bojack: "'She drips *red* ', falls back onto the *shiny* mattress', 'can *never* open her eyes again'... Yeah, I'm pretty sure all that metaphorical bullshit means she was murdered."

Jesse: "Wait, what about the mattress part? I thought that was like, her fallin' asleep or something."

Saiki: " *Did you think it literally meant a mattress* ?"

Hayasaka: "As it was described as 'shiny', my best guess would be something sharp."

Brian: "Oh, so the metaphor was kind of playing on the image of sleep instead of outright saying she died."

L: "Yes, as from the way the poem depicts it, it can be inferred the 'beloved', or Natsuki, is murdered."

Natsuki: "Wh…What the hell? Why would Yuri write about my death?"

Bojack: "Well, considering you're still alive, it could've been a warning or something."

Mai: "I can't see that being the case. If Yuri knew someone was planning to kill Natsuki, I think she'd tell everyone in a more clear manner."

Jesse: "Also, wasn't Yuri like, super into her? There's no way she'd let somethin' like that slide."

Natsuki: "D-Don't say it like that!"

Latte: "But then, I just couldn't see Yuri writing something so horrible about her best friend!"

Hayasaka: ("Ah, this is rather odd to overcome…")

Brian: “...And I’m surprised Ena managed to figure this out, haha.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, t-that’s it!”

Brian: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: “If the poem was understood by Ena, shouldn’t the poem be *for* them?”

Saiki: “ *They were the target here after all* .”

Kurumada: “Shit, really? Then we just gotta figure out where they tie into it!”

Jesse: “Maybe Ena was the one who shanked Natsuki in the poem?”

L: “Unlikely. If Yuri was aware Ena was planning to murder, I’m certain she wouldn’t have gone about things so cryptidly, especially as this is Natsuki we’re talking about here.”

Mai: “And wouldn’t Ena have been swayed away from doing such a thing when Yuri recited her poem regardless?”

Kurumada: “Damnit, I thought we were finally gettin’ somewhere!”

Bojack: “Why can’t we just ask the girl in question if she has any idea?”

Latte: “Natsuki, dear, do you know anything about Yuri’s writing habits? As you knew her the best, I’m sure you’ll be of better help to us here.”

Natsuki: “Huh? Um–K-Kinda. Apart from using metaphors, she usually liked to write in the first person. And, um, she also always hid a deeper message underneath the language – usually personal issues or whatever.”

L: “...I had a feeling that was the case, but it’s good to see my suspicions have been confirmed.”

Jesse: “The hell’re you talking about?”

L: “Think about it. Natsuki just listed an attribute about the poem we had all wrongly assumed from the beginning.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… A-Are you referring to the perspective…?”

Brian: “Erm, what was wrong with it?”

Mai: “A first person perspective can make something more personal, as if we’re looking inside the writer’s mind!”

L: “Yes, the poem is written in first person. However, it was never specifically specified that the perspective was from Yuri herself.”

Kurumada: “Are you fucking kidding me?! Who the hell writes from a different perspective in the first person?”

Bojack: “Basically most writers on the planet – have you never read a book before in your life?”

Kurumada: “Shaddup! That ain’t the point here!”

Saiki: “ *Good grief, can we move on now* ?”

Latte: “Hum, so if the poem was written from someone else’s perspective, then who?”

Hayasaka: “Knowing this poem was presumably intended for Ena, I would assume it was… ah, them.”

Mai: “Actually, if you read through the poem again in their perspective, some of the lines start to make more sense. The ‘saviour’ line must have been coercing Ena into saving Natsuki from being harmed.”

Brian: “Oh, and the ‘I wish I was there sooner’ part is kind of like a threat, right?”

Jesse: “Wait, but like, there’s somethin’ here I don’t get. Why’s Ena bein’ threatened to save Natsuki?”

Latte: “Why wouldn’t Ena want to save her?”

Jesse: “No, I’m just sayin’... Apart from being chained together, or whatever, I didn’t think the two were *that* close.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, that is true, however…”)

FLASHBACK

Ena: “Although my triggers are much lighter than most of you, my most top priority is to keep myself in check so as to not harm my friends, and more importantly myself! We are stronger than our feelings.”

Natsuki: “...I don’t feel very strong.”

Ena: “Do not worry! It is also very much okay to let out those emotions from time to time, contrary to what our thoughts may say. And I am sure if Yuri is a true friend, she will take these feelings to her heart.”

Natsuki’s eyes drifted to the ground, reflecting on Ena’s words.

Natsuki: “...Thank you, Ena.”

Ena: “Oh, it is no problem at all! I am no good at speeches, you see.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “I believe Natsuki and Ena got close during the past few days. Saiki and I were a witness to Ena comforting her.”

Saiki: “ *Mhm* .”

Mai: “Oh, and weren’t the two sitting with each other at the venue last night too?”

Kurumada: “Oi, is that true? Did ya really become friends with Ena?”

Natsuki: “...Y-Yeah, I did.”

L: “Well then, with that confirmed, Ena looking out for Natsuki’s life after such a threatening message presented to them wouldn’t have been impossible.”

Brian: “W-Wait, so that means… the person – the *killer* – to convince Ena to come to the clocktower was…”

Hayasaka: “...Yuri. It was Yuri.”

Bojack: “Yeah, OK, well I’m not surprised. I mean, we should’ve expected this.”

Natsuki: “What do you mean by that…?!”

Latte: “But, to use Natsuki in her poem to trick Ena is…”

Kurumada: “It’s exactly the kinda manipulative shit I can see her pullin’, alright.”

Jesse: “So when Ena arrived at the clocktower, instead of expectin’ to see Natsuki, Yuri jumped out n’ pushed them off the top like some kinda bait n’ switch?”

Monotora: “Surprise attack! Kehehe!”

L: “That would be fine, if not for the fact that the motive was still a variable at the time. It was not possible for both Yuri and Ena to travel to the third island alone without their partner.”

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “...”

Mai: “You’re not accusing them of being a part of this, are you?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, but L’s right. Since those two were connected to Yuri and Ena at the time, they’d have to be nearby, surely. However, that only makes them appear suspicious…”)

Kurumada: “So? All they gotta do is spill their alibi.”

Brian: “But how are we supposed to validate where they were at the time if we don’t know when Ena died?”

Bojack: “Well how did Ena know when they died?”

Jesse: “Uh, what?”

Bojack: “I mean, when the hell did Ena know when to actually show up at the clocktower?”

Mai: “Oh, that’s right! We only ever figured out that it took place at night, but not an exact time. Perhaps the time is hidden somewhere in the poem? How about the line ‘the chime strikes the fateful hour’?”

L: “You are correct. As it is clearly paired with the line ‘the devil’s number doubled’, this number must be the hour Ena was coerced to arrive at the clocktower.”

Brian: “The devil’s number… 6-6-6.”

Kurumada: “Three sixes ain’t a time, dumbass.”

Jesse: “Hol’ up, I got an idea. It said to double it, right? So let’s just add ‘em up and double the result. Math, bitch!”

Saiki: “ *...That equals 36. Which is not a time* .”

Jesse: “Uh, how about 3:06?”

Bojack: “Oh yeah, let me just invite somebody at a non 5-minute interval because that makes absolute sense.”

Mai: “And as it mentions the ‘fateful hour’, it mustn’t have a minute interval connected to it.”

Jesse: “Well at least *I’m* tryn’a come up with shit over here!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, what if… instead of using all three numbers, we take only one six and double that? That makes 12, and as this is taking place at night, I would assume it means 12A.M.? Haha…”

Kurumada: “That makes a shit ton more sense. Leave it to the Ultimate Office Worker to crunch the numbers, eh? Heheh.”

Hayasaka: “I-It was hardly anything to do with that…”

Brian: “So then, where were Natsuki and Latte at that time?”

Natsuki: “I was in my hotel room the entire night, okay?”

L: “I suppose you wouldn't have evidence to prove it, however I would be lying if I said I wasn’t the same in that regard.”

Saiki: “ *Why did you even bring it up then* ?”

Latte: “I, on the other hand, was at the library.”

Bojack: “The library? You mean miss crazy HQ? OK, you’re just confessing at this point.”

Mai: “That isn’t the full truth! She was invited there by Yuri.”

Jesse: “ *Her* ? How the hell are we supposed to believe that?”

Hayasaka: (“Thankfully, I’m not hearing this story for the first time. It does seem suspicious on it’s own, however it’s definitely provable…”)

LATTE'S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: "According to Latte, she was sent a message by Yuri on her tablet. If she's telling the truth, wouldn't she be able to show us the message?"

Latte: "I can! I still have it on my tablet here…"

Kurumada: "...Shit. Wait, why the hell did Yuri want ya at the library 30 minutes before she killed Ena?"

Latte: "I'm unsure. If anything, I'm still very confused about what happened."

Natsuki: "Eh? What're you talking about?"

Latte: "I suppose I'll try to explain what happened…"

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: "So, according to that message, you were invited by Yuri to the library at 11:30P.M."

Latte: "Yes, but something strange happened when I arrived there."

Bojack: "She didn't try to attack you or anything, did she? She's a big fan of that."

Natsuki: "No she's not!"

Latte: "No, you see, I felt **something sharp hit my neck** as soon as I walked through the door, and I blacked out."

Mai: “And she was out for the whole night, weren’t you?”

Latte: “Unfortunately so. I only woke up in the morning…”

Kurumada: “What the hell? That was anticlimactic as shit!”

Hayasaka: (“Is Latte telling the truth? I believe she might be, considering what I found…”)

ANAESTHETIC BOTTLE

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I-It does sound a little odd, but I think Latte’s story is true. Saiki and I found a bottle of anaesthetic in the library, which must’ve been what caused her to black out.”

Saiki: “ *If she was hit by something sharp, it was probably a syringe* .”

L: “It’s not impossible for the appropriate dose to knock you unconscious for that amount of time, either.”

Latte: “Oh my, I hadn’t even thought of that. The moment I felt it, I was out like a light.”

Jesse: “Shit, it must’ve been some hell’a strong drug.”

Monotora: “Nesos Pharmacy’s anaesthetics are quick acting – perfect for knocking anyone unconscious for whatever reason you may have!”

Bojack: “I don’t like how you phrased it with ‘whatever reason’... Or do I?”

Kurumada: “How come you were knocked out just like that? Surely you would’a seen it comin’.”

Hayasaka: “I don’t think she had the chance to. As we found the anaesthetic at the entrance, that was most likely where she was attacked.”

Brian: “So Latte couldn’t have had the chance to fight back even if she wanted to, huh?”

L: “It was in Yuri’s best interest, if you think about it.”

Natsuki: “But why would Yuri even do that? Why would she want to knock out Latte?”

Mai: “I don’t believe she intended to hurt her. After all, she doesn’t have any injuries on her.”

Jesse: “What if it was somethin’ to do with bein’ partners? So Yuri could go to the third island without blowin’ up, she got Latte as close as possible.”

Brian: “But isn’t the library on the second island?”

Saiki: “ *That’s still a considerable gap between the two if Yuri tried to go to the clocktower* .”

Monotora: “She would’a went *boom* ! Gahaha!”

L: “However, it’s true that Yuri would require Latte’s presence if she was to move freely to the third island.”

Latte: “But how would that be possible?”

Hayasaka: (“Somehow, Yuri did something in order to get past the motive… I have some ideas, but it’s best to see what everyone else thinks…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Kurumada: “So why did Yuri knock out Latte on the second island if she wanted to go to the third?”

Mai: “Perhaps she invited Latte to the library as it’d be less suspicious?”

Bojack: “I guess ‘hey come to the clocktower – you know, that place that nobody goes’ wouldn’t be a very convincing invite.”

Jesse: “Yo! What if Yuri carried Latte with her to the third island?”

Natsuki: “What the hell? Do you seriously think Yuri was that strong?”

Latte: “I don’t think I’d be that easy to carry, either…”

L: “Perhaps it wasn’t a means of keeping the connection, but breaking it instead.”

Kurumada: “Are you sayin’ she broke outta her cuff? **That’s impossible**! She would’a been killin’ Latte otherwise!”

Latte: “S-She would’ve?”

Mai: “Kurumada! Don’t scare her!”

Kurumada: “I’m just sayin’!”

Hayasaka: (“Hah… In fact, I’m sure that was exactly the case.”)

BURNED HANDCUFF

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Despite the fact we were told the handcuffs were impossible to escape, Saiki and I found a broken handcuff in the library.”

Kurumada: “Wait, are ya serious?”

Hayasaka: “At first, I was unsure who it belonged to, seeing as it was past when everyone was set free from the handcuffs. However, it makes the most sense to be Yuri’s, right?”

Saiki: “ *She even lacked one on her person when we saw her body* .”

L: “That is true. I had a suspicion that she had tampered with her cuff upon seeing it missing.”

Bojack: “What’s with you and waiting for other people to discover the thing you already know?”

L: “It would be rather boring and quiet if you all stood around waiting for me. Also, I am intrigued with this trial set-up – it’s awfully fun seeing things play out.”

Brian: “I-I’m not sure if I’d consider this, uh, ‘fun’...”

Jesse: “Who cares about what he thinks? What I wanna know is how Yuri broke outta her cuff.”

Mai: “Perhaps there was something suspicious in the library… Oh, how about that thing we found? The toolbox!”

Natsuki: “Eh? What toolbox?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, there was a toolbox a little further into the library. The most noticeable things we found were a hammer and a match box.”

Kurumada: “Well, there ya go then! Yuri ‘prolly smashed open the cuff with the hammer.”

L: “Unlikely. If that was the method of escape, then Yuri would’ve at least suffered bruising to her wrist upon the impact. But as you even saw yourself, her wrist was clean.”

Jesse: “Also, there’s no way she could’a used brute force anyway. I was tryn’a tinker with my cuff a bit in the woodworking shop from time to time, and all it left behind was a dent. Just usin’ tools wouldn’t have cut it.”

Bojack: “Hang on – *you* were trying to break out of your handcuff?”

Jesse: “Well, kinda. I thought, like, you’d appreciate it, or whatever…”

Bojack: “Oh.”

Brian: “Um… Maybe there was a different weakness to the handcuffs?”

Latte: “Was there anything strange about the handcuff you found, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “That is… Ah, if I recall correctly, it looked as if it had been melted.”

L: “Melted… I see. The handcuff’s weakness… It must’ve been heat.”

Natsuki: “Heat? Like, it was burned or something?”

Saiki: “ *It was still made from metal after all* .”

Kurumada: “What’s with this place and shitty technology?!”

Monotora: “How dare you call Nesos’ work shitty! If anything, *I’m* far more advanced than you meat bags will ever be!”

Jesse: “But how the hell did she even burn it? She’d need some sorta heat to do that.”

Latte: “What if she used a match stick? There were plenty inside the toolbox.”

Bojack: “You’re telling me she used a singular match stick to melt a handcuff clean off?”

L: “Keep in mind Yuri only possessed thirty minutes between rendering Latte unconscious and supposedly pushing Ena off the top of the clocktower. It would have taken her far longer than that to melt the handcuff completely off.”

Hayasaka: (“Then what if… There was something else to aid the fire?”)

PILE OF BOOKS

Hayasaka: “Mai, I recall you mentioning something when we were looking over that pile of burnt books – how you said it resembled a campfire of sorts…”

Mai: “Oh, yes! But you’re not trying to say Yuri had a camping trip inside the library now, are you?”

Hayasaka: “W-What? N-No, I just thought… What if the books were lit on fire with the matchsticks?”

Brian: “I see! So there’d be a much bigger fire for Yuri to use to melt her handcuff off.”

Kurumada: “Ain’t that ironic? She burned what she loved the most.”

Natsuki: “That’s not even funny in the slightest, you jerk!”

Hayasaka: “E-Even so, that must’ve been how Yuri managed to break out of her handcuff–”

Latte: “Pay more attention!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “L-Latte?”

Latte: “Excuse me for butting in like that, Hayasaka, but I just don’t agree that’s what happened. Now, please pay attention to what I have to say.”

Hayasaka: (“Oh dear, I feel as if a lecture is about to occur…”)

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Latte: “I must admit, my previous assumption that a small matchstick could melt Yuri’s handcuff off in time was misguided. But, isn’t this the same argument?”

Hayasaka: “N-Not exactly. With a bigger fire, it’d take a lot less time for the fire to eat through the metal.”

Latte: “Ah! But surely a bigger fire means a bigger hazard! If Yuri **placed her wrist over the fire** , she couldn’t have been too close or else her wrist would’ve been burnt as well!”

TOOLBOX

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “No, I don’t think Yuri placed her wrist over the fire at all. In fact, do you remember that hammer with the dark mark on its head? I believe the fire was the direct cause of it.”

Jesse: “Ohh, so she smelted her cuff off, eh?”

Brian: “Smelted?”

Jesse: “Y’know, when you place a metal object over heat, wait ‘til it’s red hot, n’ then place it against what you wanna burn. It was somethin’ me n’ Mr. White did when we– uh, did… stuff…”

Bojack: “Well that was a totally not suspicious explanation.”

Mai: “So in the end, it was a mixture of using both tools and heat to break free from her handcuff!”

Saiki: “ *That explains why the handcuff looked so weirdly melted, I guess* .”

Natsuki: “And that’s why the dark mark was left behind? I guess that makes sense… Still, for Yuri to go through all of that just to escape her handcuff?”

L: “It would consequently mean her connection with Latte was broken, allowing her to freely travel to the third island to meet Ena at the clock tower.”

Kurumada: “What’s next? Ya gonna say she left Latte in the library the whole night?”

L: “Well, yes.”

Kurumada: “Bullshit! Even you should remember the damn ‘snap-back’ clause!”

Bojack: “You mean that whole ‘if someone breaks out of their cuff it’ll just snap back to the other and blow them up’ thing?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, perhaps… L said that heat was the handcuff’s weakness. If that’s true, once Yuri had exposed it to the heated hammer, shouldn’t it have broken?”

Mai: “And that would’ve meant all its features would’ve lost its use, wouldn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Eh? Is that true?!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! It seems I’ve been caught out. Eh, whatever. I’ll give ya this one – yeah, yeah, the weakness was heat, n’ all the damn work we put inside it would’a melted away into nothin’! This is why you should never bring fire near a computer!”

Saiki: “ *Who has access to fire on a usual basis* ?”

Latte: “I suppose that means I was safe all along…”

Mai: “Not only safe physically, but since you must’ve been asleep the whole night, then there’s no reason to suspect you!”

Brian: “Can being knocked unconscious count as sleeping?”

L: “Regardless, her story does line up with Yuri’s method of escape. Therefore, there’s only one individual left with an unverified alibi.”

Natsuki: “...W-What’re you looking at? I told you where I was, didn’t I?”

Jesse: “If you were at the hotel the whole night, then how did Ena like, even manage to get to the second island without blowin’ up?”

Natsuki: “I don’t know! Maybe they escaped their handcuff too, like Yuri did?”

Hayasaka: “That can’t be the case. Ena’s handcuff was still on their wrist when we investigated their body…”

Kurumada: “And it didn’t look like it had been tampered with, either.”

Bojack: “Well, that only leaves one option. She’s lying.”

Natsuki: “Lying? I’m not lying! Why would I even lie about something like this?!”

Latte: “It doesn’t feel like she is, though…”

Mai: “However, you can’t deny how odd it is. As neither Ena nor Natsuki’s handcuffs were removed, they had to have been following the rules of the motive.”

Brian: “That means if Ena was at the clocktower, then Natsuki had to be nearby, right?”

L: “Or, perhaps a lot closer than that.”

Jesse: “Wait… Are you sayin’ Natsuki was *at* the clocktower herself?”

Natsuki: “Wh–H-Huh?”

L: “If you recall the poem, Yuri had in essence lured Ena with the threat of Natsuki’s life.”

Latte: “But I thought that was just a trick to convince Ena to go to the clocktower.”

Saiki: “ *And what would’ve happened if they didn’t see the person in question they were trying to save at all* ?”

Kurumada: “Now that ya mention it, if I was ‘em, findin’ that person would be my damn top priority!”

Hayasaka: “So if Ena couldn’t see Natsuki anywhere in the clocktower, there’s a chance they’d be less likely to willingly go to the top of the tower.”

L: “Whether she was at the top or ground floor isn’t relevant, however upon seeing Natsuki’s presence, Ena would be that much more convinced to be manipulated into travelling to the top to be pushed down by Yuri.”

Jesse: “Still, yo. Who would wanna work with Yuri? Y’know… *Yuri* .”

Bojack: “Did you conveniently forget the only person that actually trusted Yuri post-crazy revelation was Natsuki?”

Jesse: “I meant *willingly* , asshole!”

Brian: “Maybe it wasn’t a willing thing? Yuri could have threatened her, similar to how she did with Ena in the poem.”

Mai: “So what you’re trying to say is that when Ena arrived at the top of the clocktower thinking they were going to save Natsuki, Yuri jumped out and pushed them down? Oh, what a horrible thing for her to do.”

Latte: “But that can’t be true… Were you really at the clocktower last night, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “T-That…”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki…”)

Natsuki: “...Wait! There’s something you’re clearly overlooking here!”

L: “Oh? Do tell.”

Natsuki: “It’s just–I overheard what Jesse said, y’know, about how he and Bojack were at the woodworking shop last night around the same time Ena was killed. If that was the case, then why didn’t they hear Ena screaming, or–or even them hitting the floor after falling?”

Kurumada: “Eh? Is that even possible?”

Natsuki: “Yeah! The clocktower had a bunch of open windows – it’s not like they wouldn’t have been able to hear it or anything!”

Brian: “And since the clocktower lies in the middle of the island, the sound would’ve been heard from any direction. In that sense, I guess she has a point.”

L: “...What was the time of Ena’s death, may I recall?”

Latte: “That’s a bit of a silly question. Did you forget since there’s so much going on inside your mind? I get that sometimes.”

Hayasaka: (“...I don’t think L asked that because he forgot. If Ena died at 12A.M., then…”) “Ah, the chime!”

Kurumada: “The what?”

Hayasaka: “U-Um, since it *was* a clocktower, its purpose would be to, well, tell the time. That would include chimes at every consecutive hour.”

Saiki: “ *So when Ena fell at the 12th hour, the chime would’ve covered any noise.* ”

Mai: “Ah, in fact, I believe Yuri must’ve invited Ena to the clocktower at such a timely interval *because* of the chime. Even more conveniently at 12A.M., where 12 consecutive chimes would be emitted. It would’ve given plenty of time to mask the sound of Ena screaming and hitting the floor, wouldn’t it?”

Jesse: “Yeah, shit, I forgot about that chime. Like, it was super loud as well. I was kinda creeped out by how we could hear it from all the way from the shop.”

Bojack: “Hell, it even woke me up from my, uh, half-passed out nap.”

Natsuki: “Then why didn’t you mention it before?!”

Jesse: “I didn’t think it was important, y’know? Why’re you gettin’ so defensive over that?”

Kurumada: “And what’s with *you* bringin’ up that whole screamin’ part anyway?”

Natsuki: “W-Well, it was a factor in the murder, right?”

Brian: “But even I didn’t consider Ena screaming until you brought it up…”

L: “In fact, it’s quite curious how you brought it up at all. The sound of Ena hitting the floor should’ve been a logical assumption we could’ve all made, but to include such a detail in your argument must’ve meant you were conscious of such a fact if you were there to hear it for yourself.”

Natsuki: “G-Gh…”

Bojack: “Sounds to me like you’ve dug your own grave.”

Latte: “Natsuki…”

Natsuki: “Nn... *F-Fine* ! I was at the clocktower, okay?!”

Hayasaka: “You’re… admitting you were there?”

Natsuki: “What the hell else am I supposed to say? If I denied it, you were all just gonna keep pressing me anyway!”

Saiki: “ *That’s a pretty grounded response* .”

Kurumada: “So why the hell were you there? Were you in on it with Yuri?”

Natsuki: “N-No! Just listen to me, okay? Y-You don’t know the full story!”

Mai: “Full story?”

Natsuki: “...When I chased Yuri out of the venue last night, she actually told me to come to the clocktower a little bit before 12A.M.”

L: “And you simply accepted this request?”

Natsuki: “Just because you all didn’t trust her, doesn’t mean I didn’t! I thought she wanted to finally talk things out with me in private! I thought she wanted to use the clocktower ‘cuz it was more secluded, or whatever… Anyway, while I was waiting, I saw Ena arrive from the bottom, and when they saw me they climbed the stairs to see me. I was kinda confused, but… that was when Yuri jumped out and pushed them off the top exactly at 12A.M., when the chimes began to play.”

Brian: “What happened after that?”

Natsuki: “...Yuri then told me to leave and go back to the hotel as quickly as I could. And… I did.”

Latte: “But how was that possible? Weren’t you still connected to Ena at the time?”

Natsuki: “That, um… Apparently when Ena died, the link between us was removed. Despite how our cuffs remained on our wrists, I was able to run back to the hotel without any problem… I just… I-I had no idea Yuri was planning such a thing at all.”

Mai: “Natsuki…”

Hayasaka: (“...I see. So, Natsuki was a part of Yuri’s murder plan, without realising? I… suppose this changes her original account.”)

Truth bullet updated: Natsuki’s Account

Bojack: “...Yeah. That’s a load of bullshit.”

Natsuki: “ *W-What* …?!”

Bojack: “Come on. Are you seriously expecting us to believe that hand-fisted confession? I’ve seen better continuity on sitcoms. Not to say my sitcom has bad continuity. Mine’s in a completely different ballpark that can't be compared, just so you understand."

Jesse: "The hell d'you mean by that? She basically confessed to, like, actually bein' there! I think that's enough to believe her, y'know?"

L: "I must admit… Her story has its flaws."

Jesse: "Yeah, 'cuz she *just* had to retell watchin' a fucking murder go down! Obviously her story's gonna be all over the place!"

Bojack: "It only happened last night, Todd 2, not last week."

Jesse: "Fuck you! Why're you so damn heated on suspectin' a kid for?"

Bojack: "Really? Are you really trying to pull the 'kid' card? I'm sorry – was Hiroshi not a kid? Was Kaidou not a kid? Was Yuri not a fucking kid?"

Latte: "Excuse me, this fighting is extremely unnecessary–"

Jesse: "She's *different* , yo! Did you not see how she was when she saw her best fuckin' friend dead in front of her eyes?!"

Bojack: "There's nothing *different* about it!"

Kurumada: "Damnit, would you two shut the hell up?! Now ain't the fucking time!"

Hayasaka: ("G-Good lord… For a fight to break out like this, we're not going to be able to get anywhere. Perhaps… If I attempted to interject into their argument, I could get us back on the right track? Ha, look at me saying something so confident… I don't even think I could try with those two…")

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...But still, Natsuki’s story needs to be discussed a little more. I-I’ll just have to try my best, haha…”)

BALANCE BATTLE

Bojack: “Why would Natsuki show up to a place no-one even goes?”

Jesse: “Natsuki trusted Yuri – it’s obvious she was taken advantage of!”

AFFIRM BOJACK

Hayasaka: “I-I have to admit that even Natsuki should’ve been the least bit suspicious of being invited to the clocktower.”

Bojack: “Anyone would’ve at least questioned the location Yuri wanted her to come to.”

Jesse: “She’d have no reason to doubt Yuri, dumbass!”

DENY JESSE

Hayasaka: “It wasn’t about doubting Yuri, but it wouldn’t make sense for Natsuki to do something so carefreely, either.”

Bojack: “And you’re telling me she did nothing after Ena was pushed?”

Jesse: “She wasn’t expectin’ it to happen! Of course she was gonna be scared shitless!”

AFFIRM JESSE

Hayasaka: “According to her story, Natsuki wasn’t aware Yuri had even arrived yet. I believe there must’ve been a moment of panic involved…”

Bojack: “And you’re telling me she obediently fled the scene of her so-called friend’s murder?”

Jesse: “She must’a got mad afterwards! Maybe she just forgot about that part!”

AFFIRM JESSE

Hayasaka: “It would make sense for Natsuki to get angry. But, that wouldn’t have been the end of it…”

BREAK

Latte: “Huh? What do you mean it wouldn’t have been the end of it?”

Hayasaka: “If you think about it, if Natsuki was to get mad, wouldn’t she have begun to fight Yuri and accuse her of why she had just killed Ena?”

Brian: “It does line up with how she fought with Yuri in the second trial after all. Wait, how did you think of that, Hayasaka?”

Mai: “I believe he has a friend who’s awfully similar in nature he’s grown accustomed to, hm?”

Kurumada: “What?! I ain’t like that!”

Saiki: “ *You weren’t even called out by name, and yet you confirmed it yourself* .”

Hayasaka: “I-I know that argument is purely based on her character, but…”

L: “I can’t blame you entirely, Hayasaka. After all, you were working on the basis of two rather emotional claims. Now that they’ve been humoured a little, I think it’s appropriate to let Natsuki speak for herself.”

Natsuki: “Well, I-I… I was too afraid to get mad! I just wanted to run away and forget everything that happened as if it was a nightmare and when Yuri told me to run I just did! I-I know I shouldn’t have, but I just couldn’t help it at the time!”

Jesse: “Damnit…”

Kurumada: “Kinda feels like a weak excuse to me.”

Natsuki: “What else can I say?! It’s not like you have any evidence to prove otherwise, or else this’ll just be a battle of hearsay!”

Hayasaka: (“What Natsuki’s saying… Is there more to her involvement than what she’s told us?”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “If there’s something Natsuki hasn’t told us, then it must be something we overlooked at the clocktower.”

Kurumada: “Did ya check the top of the clocktower properly?”

Saiki: “ *The flooring was small – it would’ve been impossible to miss anything* .”

Mai: “Then perhaps it had something to do with Ena themself?”

Brian: “But we’ve talked about all their injuries, though…”

Kurumada: “Not their face yet. If I recall, it was all sad n’ shit.”

Latte: “You mean they were in their sad state?”

Natsuki: “Well, that’s obvious! Of course Ena **would’ve been sad from falling to their death**! You wouldn’t even need to be there to picture it.”

Bojack: “Well, so much for this discussion going anywhere…”

Hayasaka: ("...Hang on. That isn't *exactly* how it works…")

ENA'S FACE POST-MORTEM

Hayasaka: ("This is it!")

BREAK

Hayasaka: "I… I just don't think Ena was triggered because of that alone."

Latte: "I have to agree with that! I believe Ena's emotions worked more personally."

L: "Indeed they do. If you have ever seen how Ena functions, their triggers usually lie within witnessing or hearing upsetting events."

Mai: "Then perhaps Ena saw something upsetting before they were pushed?"

Kurumada: "The poem did say Yuri was gonna 'kill Natsuki' or whatever – who's to say she didn't try n' follow through on that and attack her?"

Jesse: "If she did, wouldn't she have, like, an injury to show for it?"

Natsuki: "And I don't! See?"

Kurumada: "Alright! Don't shove your brat arms in my face!"

Brian: "Hum, what if it was something less physical and more… emotional? A-As it is emotions we're talking about, after all."

Mai: “Like when you see someone else cry and you can’t help but cry yourself?”

Bojack: “That’s usually when the performance is actually convincing.”

Hayasaka: “It wouldn’t have needed to be convincing if it was genuine, however.”

Latte: “Are you saying Ena saw Natsuki upset before they were pushed?”

Natsuki: “Huh? What does that even mean? Of *course* I was shocked when Yuri pushed Ena!”

Saiki: “ *How would Ena have even seen you when they were pushed* ?”

Natsuki: “W-What…?”

L: “For Ena to have swapped emotional states, it would have to have been *before* they were pushed. Therefore, you were already showing signs of sadness prior to the event.”

Jesse: “So what the hell upset her beforehand? She didn’t even know Yuri was gonna jump out an’ kill Ena.”

L: “Then think about it from the perspective from which she *did* .”

Hayasaka: (“If Natsuki *knew* Yuri was going to kill Ena…?”)

Mai: “If she knew beforehand… Surely she would have appeared at least somewhat apprehensive.”

Brian: “Knowing that someone was going to be killed – I-I guess that would be pretty frightening.”

L: “However, I propose it goes even deeper than that. I believe Natsuki was possibly reluctant to do something.”

Kurumada: “What the hell? Now ya just makin’ shit up.”

Hayasaka: (“What would Natsuki need to do, if she knew of the murder plans prior? Yuri’s murder plan… *Yuri’s* murder plan…?”) “... *Why would Yuri need to kill Ena* ?”

Latte: “What was that? I could hardly hear you, dear.”

Hayasaka: “I-I apologise, but I think there’s something we’ve overlooked. If Yuri was the one to push Ena – effectively making her the culprit – then if she were to win in this trial… wouldn’t that mean we would all die, including Natsuki…?”

Jesse: “Wait, but I thought… Like her goal was to get both her and Natsuki off the island.”

L: “Yes, but the last trial was different in that regard. Here, we are not dealing with the extra ‘plus-one’ motive. This is simply a normal trial where only the culprit can win.”

Hayasaka: “And if you remember, Yuri wasn’t killing to save herself – her ultimate goal was to have us all die, par Natsuki. She would’ve wanted us to all vote incorrectly.”

Bojack: “Yeah, no way that was ever going to happen. If she was still here, I don’t think we’d actually need to even have a trial.”

Brian: “But that means Yuri’s murder would’ve been pointless from the start…”

Hayasaka: “That’s the thing. I don’t think… I don’t think it *was* Yuri’s murder at all.”

Kurumada: “Wait. You ain’t sayin’ it’s…”

L: “ *Natsuki’s* .”

Natsuki: “ *H-Huh* ?!”

L: “Think about it. If Natsuki’s the culprit of this case, Yuri would’ve been able to put on a show convincing enough to ganer the majority to vote for her. I’m doubtful most would have even battered an eye towards Natsuki. Therefore, Yuri would’ve effectively gotten what she had desired: everyone would’ve died, leaving only Natsuki standing.”

Mai: “So when you said Natsuki was reluctant to perform something, you were referring to the fact she was to push Ena off the top of the clocktower herself?”

Jesse: “What the hell? *You* were the one to push Ena, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “I–N-No! I didn’t! I-I didn’t at all! You’re all wrong! Yuri did it! Yuri pushed them anyway so what you said doesn’t matter!”

Latte: “But if that’s true, then we can’t say Natsuki is the killer.”

L: “...Perhaps not.”

Natsuki: “E-Eh…?”

L: “Perhaps Yuri had no trouble in pushing Ena… as it wasn’t what truly killed them in the end.”

Kurumada: “ *What* ?!”

Latte: “What’re you saying…?!”

Bojack: “OK, this trial is driving me nuts.”

Natsuki: “What the hell are you even talking about? E-Even I watched Yuri push Ena off the top of the clocktower, so there can’t be any other way for them to have died!”

L: “I suppose you have a point. That is why my theory only has a five percent chance or so of being correct.”

Brian: “Um, that’s a little… low, isn’t it?”

Jesse: “If you want us to take you seriously, then stop pullin’ random numbers out your ass!”

Hayasaka: (“Ena died… a different way? Is that even possible?”)

L: “I see you’re thinking about it, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: A-Ah, no, I…”

Mai: “Even if it’s true the cause of death was omitted from the Nesos File, there was no mention of anything else other than what we’ve already discussed about Ena, correct?”

Hayasaka: “...Not exactly.”

Natsuki: “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Hayasaka: “Isn’t it a little odd how Ena’s file was worded? How it explicitly states the ‘external’ wounds only?”

Bojack: “So what?”

Kurumada: “Oi, wasn’t the first file kinda similar? It never talked about Walter drownin’ ‘cuz it was meant to be hidden or whatever.”

Latte: “So what you’re saying is that something about Ena’s murder has been hidden from us here too?”

Brian: “If it’s not external, the only other place it could be is… uh, internal.”

Natsuki: “That can’t be possible–! There’s no evidence of any substance being taken from the pharmacy apart from the anaesthetic! And even that was used in the library and nowhere even near the clocktower.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...Saiki? Why is he looking at me like that for– *ah* … Is he… talking about *that* …?”)

STRYCHNINE BERRY

Hayasaka: “...T-There’s actually something suspicious we found in the kitchen during the investigation.”

Natsuki: “Huh…?”

Saiki: “ *This berry* .”

Bojack: “What? We could bring food in here too? This might actually be the best court I’ve ever been in – minus all the murder talk, obviously.”

Jesse: “Wait, is that orange? I’ve never seen a damn orange berry before.”

Hayasaka: “I apologise for putting the trial to a pause, but… Brian, could you retrieve that book you have?”

Brian: “On it! …Thankfully I folded the corner of that page, haha… Okay, uh, the–uhm, stree–stry–ah, strychnos nux, uh…O-Okay so the non-scientific name is just strychnine.”

L: “ *Strychnine* ? Hm now, well there’s a name I haven’t heard in a while.”

Kurumada: “So? What the hell is it?”

Brian: “...The strychnine berry, derived from the strychnine plant, is located in, well that’s not important, and… Oh. Uh, it says here that it’s toxic. Lethally.”

Saiki: “...”

L: “Don’t worry – you won’t be poisoned from simply handling it.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Saiki…”)

Latte: “But if that berry is poisonous, then what was it doing in the kitchen? Could Monotora have placed it there?”

Monotora: “Kehehe, what? I sure as hell didn’t!”

Bojack: “Then you’re telling me this island hosts a bunch of poisonous berries?”

Mai: “I don’t think it’s too far-fetched. There are a lot of green places where such a thing could grow.”

L: “And since we do not currently know where on Earth this island we’re situated on is located, it cannot be argued that it’s impossible for the berry to grow here.”

Jesse: “That still doesn’t answer why it was in the kitchen, smartass.”

Hayasaka: “What else does it say about the berry, Brian…?”

Brian: “Um… If ingested orally, it will take approximately two hours for the toxins to become lethal.”

Kurumada: “D’ya think Ena was given the berries by someone? What about yesterday mornin’ when everyone was at the restaurant?”

Saiki: “ *If they ate the berry then, they would’ve been dead by noon* .”

Latte: “Also, I just don’t think Ena would’ve accepted such a weird looking berry like that.”

Hayasaka: “Then what if… Ena was tricked into ingesting it somehow?”

Bojack: “And how would we even know when that happened?”

Mai: “Does it say in the book what the effect of the poison is? Maybe it’ll line up with something that occurred with Ena yesterday.”

Brian: “Let me see… *Oh wow, isn’t this lovely* …?”

Natsuki: “W-What? What does it say?”

Brian: “When the poison takes effect, the victim will suffer from muscle spasms that'll eventually turn violent. This is then followed by seizures, cramping… a-and eventually killing the victim via suffocation of an extreme spasm."

Kurumada: "Jesus–I didn't even know a fuckin' berry could do *that* ! And how'd you even manage to read that so calmly?!"

Brian: "I-I'm sorry…?"

Hayasaka: ("That… That's a lot worse than what I was expecting. I've heard of poisons that can do quite horrible things, but this…? God…")

L: "And this is what makes strychnine the perfect poison for Ena."

Jesse: "Now you're assignin' poisons to people?"

Mai: "Although, you had to admit the effects of the poison line up with Ena's usual, hm, how should I word this? Mannerisms?"

Bojack: "Since when do 'spasms' count as mannerisms?"

L: "Ena isn't exactly a typical case, mind you. And because of this, I believe one of the goals of utilising this specific poison was to hide when exactly any side-effects would appear: as Ena was notorious for their uncanny movements, it wouldn't have been out of the ordinary for anyone to see them in such a state while poisoned."

Latte: "But that means… We didn't even know they were suffering at the time!"

Saiki: " *Ena probably didn't know they were poisoned either, though.* "

Brian: "I guess that also explains why Ena was found in such an 'extreme' position at the clocktower – it must've been because of the poison."

Hayasaka: (“This coincidence of the poison’s effects and Ena’s natural body language is too heavy not to ignore. The chance of the berry being used here… it’s almost certain. But there’s still one last question: just when did Ena ingest the poison? It’s not like we would’ve been there to see Ena eat–... *Ena eat…Ah* …”)

Kurumada: “...Hayasaka?”

L: “I believe he’s come to the realisation, haven’t you?”

Hayasaka: “...The venue.”

Bojack: “Oh great, now we’re bringing up *that* again.”

Hayasaka: “N-No, ah, what I mean by that is… Wasn’t there food at the venue?”

Mai: “Oh, that’s right! Those cupcakes Natsuki baked for the event.”

Jesse: “You’re not saying the berry was *inside* one of ‘em, are you?”

Hayasaka: “But how would Ena suspect otherwise…?”

Brian: “That’s… That’s true.”

Kurumada: “Hell, not only that, but wasn’t the time of the venue way closer to when Ena died at 12A.M.? That would’a been the perfect time to give ‘em the poison, now that I think about it.”

Latte: “But, why were you so reluctant to speak up about it, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Because… B-Because it heavily incriminates only one person here.” (“It’s you, isn’t it…?”)

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “... *Natsuki* .”

Natsuki: “Wha–...? I-I–W-What’re you accusing me of? The *poison* ? I-I didn’t even know that *existed* ! You can’t be accusing me of poisoning Ena!”

Jesse: “Why does it even gotta be Natsuki from that alone? Clearly, it’s gotta be Yuri who baked that damn poison into her cupcakes.”

Latte: “Yuri was a rather intelligent girl after all… This poison plan does seem to be more aligned with her.”

L: “However, do not forget Yuri’s intentions: if she was the one who poisoned Ena, then we’d be dealing with the exact same dilemma when we thought Yuri had pushed Ena to their death – there would be no merit to her murder if she was not able to sway the outcome of the trial in her favour. With Natsuki as the poisoner on the other hand, it explains *why* Yuri was able to push Ena at all, as it had no effect on who would’ve been regarded as the true culprit.”

Natsuki: “No… N-No…!”

Bojack: “Hang on, what the hell does that even mean?”

Mai: “I think he’s referring to Ena’s true cause of death.”

Kurumada: “And how’re we supposed to know it was from the poison or the fall?!”

Hayasaka: “It had to be the poison, right…?”

Saiki: “ *What would be the point of even using the poison if it wasn’t the cause* ?”

L: “Due to the very specific timings that have been set up in this case thus far, it’s clear the poison was dispatched at such a time that when Ena was to be pushed, the poison would’ve killed them before they even hit the ground.”

Jesse: “So what the hell man?! What was point of anythin’ at the clocktower?”

Mai: “It appears it was all an elaborate scheme set up to make us *think* Ena was murdered by being pushed from the top of the clocktower, when in reality it was the poison all along.”

Brian: “So if Ena never swapped states, we would’ve never even caught onto the fact that Natsuki was involved at all.”

Natsuki: “Stop it…!”

Latte: “Natsuki… Surely we’re wrong, right? You wouldn’t kill Ena, would you–”

Natsuki: “I’M NOT A MURDERER!”

Hayasaka: “N-Natsuki…?”

Natsuki: “This is all–all stupid! It’s stupid, stupid *bullshit* !”

Jesse: “Whoa–!”

Kurumada: “What’s with the damn sailor mouth all of a sudden?!”

Natsuki: “Y-You can’t prove that! You can’t! Because… B-Because you can’t even prove I was ever involved with anything!”

Bojack: “What does that even mean? You even admitted yourself that you were in cohorts with Yuri at the clocktower for God’s sake.”

Natsuki: “No–N-No! That doesn’t *mean* anything if you can’t prove it! W-Where’s the evidence?! D-Do you have any proof other than some stupid berry?!”

Hayasaka: (“Proof…? What proof is there to give…? Natsuki, can’t you see how cornered you are…? What else is there to say to make you give up?”)

Saiki: “*... Hayasaka, you know* .”

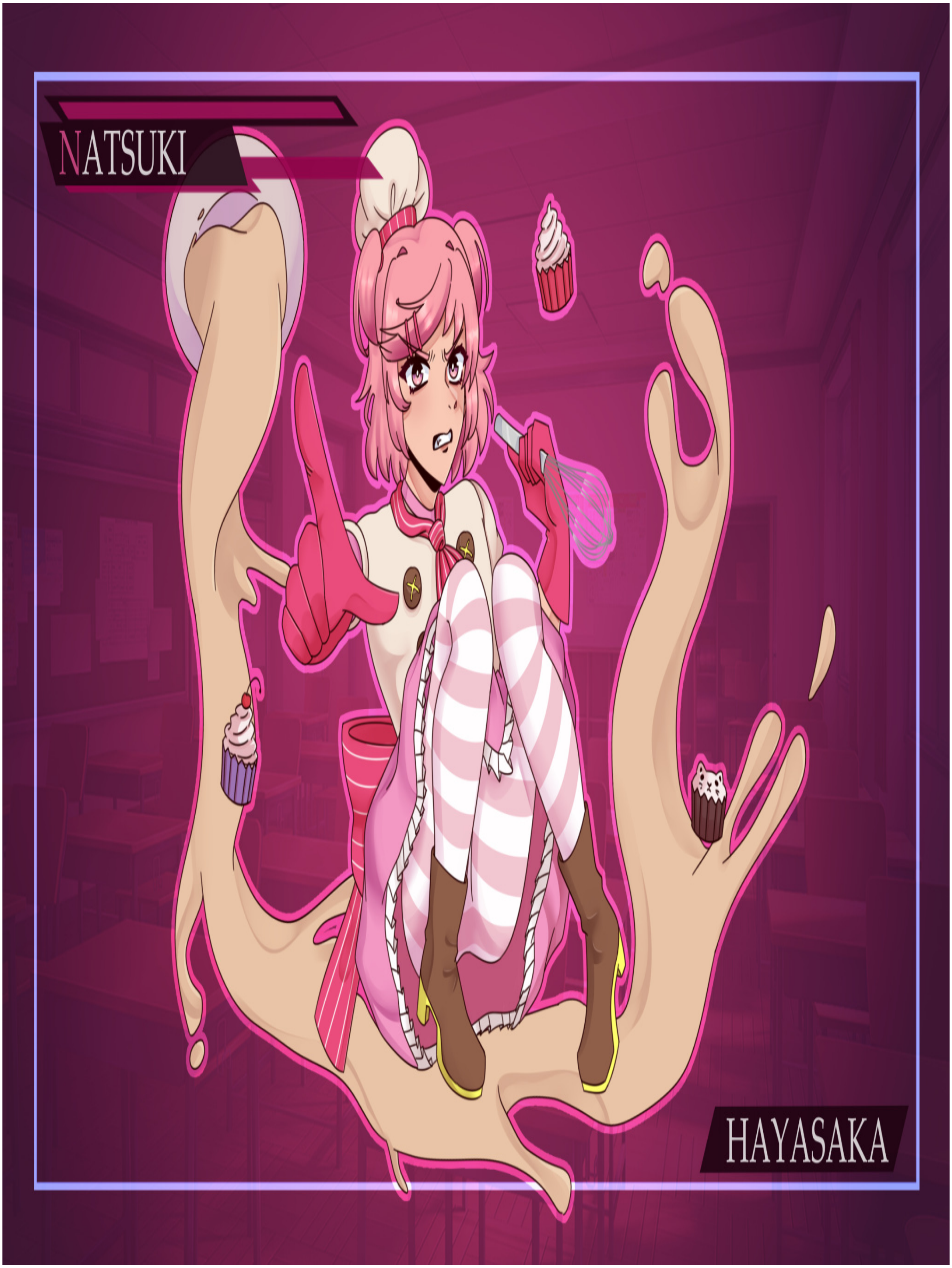
Hayasaka: (“... *That* . That’s what I can use…!”)

Latte: “Natsuki, please calm down!”

Natsuki: “Shut up! All of you need to shut up! Leave me alone! I-I can’t take this!”

Hayasaka: (“I’m sorry, Natsuki, but it’s the only thing I can use to finally end this…!”)

ARGUMENT ARMAMENT


NATSUKI
HAYASAKA

Natsuki:

“Leave me alone! Stop making these horrible accusations against me!”

“You’re just trying to bully me, aren’t you?”

“You’re just trying to bully me after my friends died!”

ADVANCE

“None of what you said is true – I didn’t murder Ena!”

“I didn’t poison them! I didn’t push them off the clocktower!”

“They were my friend! I would never do such a horrible thing!”

ADVANCE

“You’re just making excuses!”

“I told you to give me evidence and you didn’t at all!”

“You can’t prove I was at the clocktower!”

“Yuri pushed Ena! *Yuri* killed Ena! That’s the end of the case!”

“Stop talking about the poison for God’s sake!”

“I’m not a murderer! I-I’m *not* a murderer!!”

FINAL BLOW

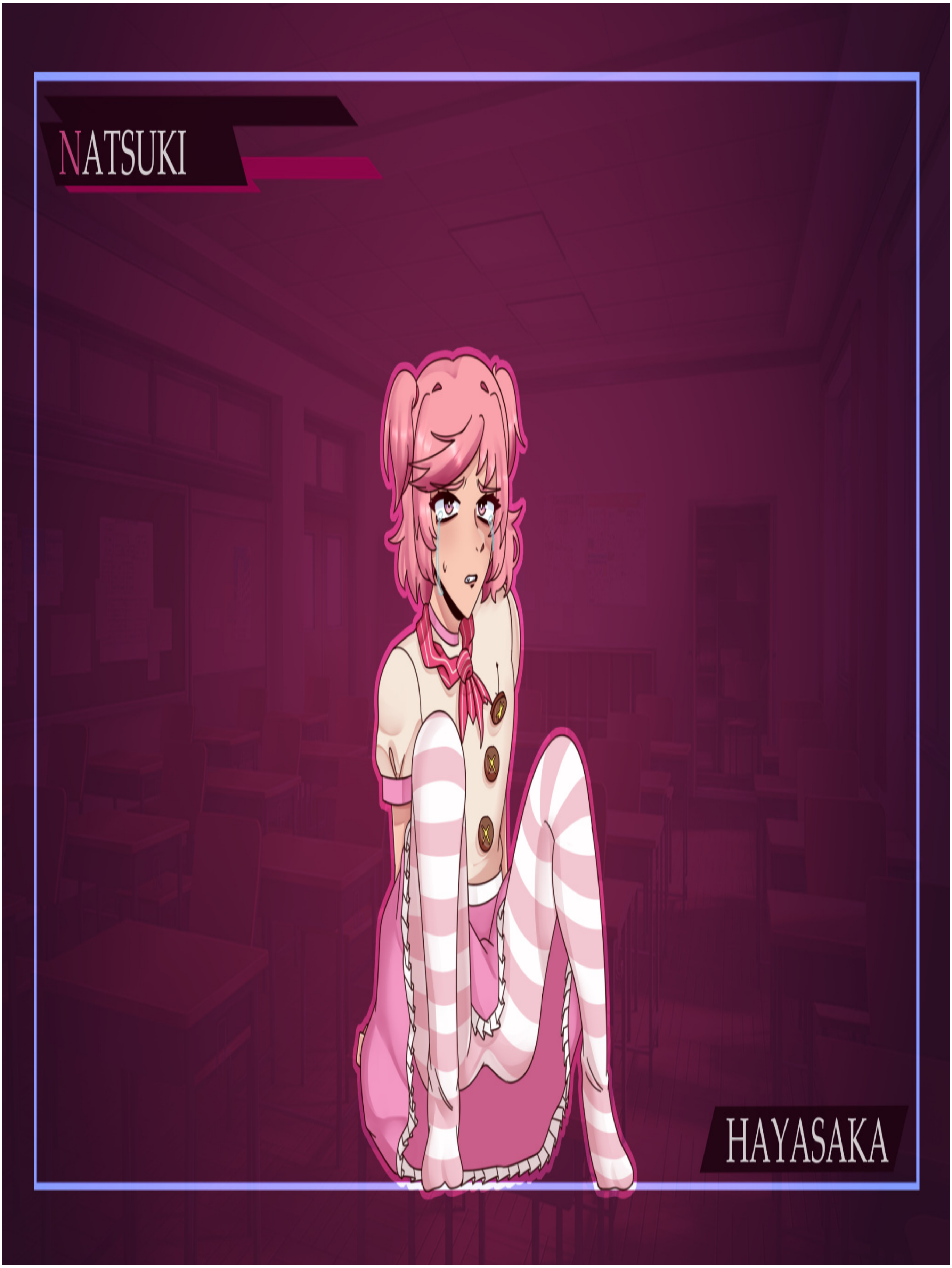
“You can’t prove I was at the clocktower… You just can’t–!”

UNEQUAL

BODY

DISCOVERY

CANDIDATES


NATSUKI
HAYASAKA

BREAK

Hayasaka: “...If Yuri was the only person present at the clocktower proceeding Ena’s death, then how was the body discovery announcement triggered after only two people discovered their body…?”

Natsuki: “Wh…Wha…?”

Brian: “Huh? What’re you talking about, Hayasaka?”

Jesse: “But I thought it was four people who found Ena – we saw you, Kurumada, Mai n’ Saiki come from the third island.”

Hayasaka: “It… It didn’t exactly play out like that. After Kurumada and Mai went to check inside the clocktower, Saiki had held me back… And only moments after hearing their shouts, the body discovery announcement for Ena played.”

Kurumada: “Shit! I didn’t even realise that!”

Mai: “But according to the rules, three people are required to have seen the body for the announcement to play…”

Latte: “Does that mean…?”

Saiki: “ *Someone had already seen the body before they had* .”

L: “...Huh. Not even I knew of that anecdote. Alas, with that, it provides us with the last of the evidence we require. Of course, this first witness had to have been Yuri. As with her was none other than Ena’s killer, Natsuki.”

Natsuki: “...Nn…Nn…o…”

Jesse: “Natsuki…”

Hayasaka: (“Everything lines up against her: her lack of a proper alibi, her eagerness to bake cupcakes for the venue, her involvement in Yuri’s poem… It all points to her.”)

Natsuki: “G-Gh… I… *sniff* … I-I can’t do this anymore… I can’t keep lying… I look like… *sob* … an idiot…”

Latte: “N-Natsuki…!”

Bojack: “You can’t be serious. You’re serious. Shit.”

Jesse: “What the hell, man…? Why’re you actin’ like you didn’t want this?! You were the one calling ‘bullshit’ before!”

Bojack: “Jesus, I didn’t–I didn’t think she was the *killer* . I just thought she was hiding that she was working with Yuri.”

Mai: “So then, you admit it… You admit that you poisoned Ena…?”

Natsuki: “ *Hic* … P-Please… Don’t make me say it…”

Hayasaka: “Urk, N-Natsuki…”

Saiki: “...”

Kurumada: “Damnit! Why’d ya do it…?!”

Brian: “Wait… Why *did* you do it? You told us earlier you became friends with Ena, so…”

Natsuki: “...I don’t have anything to lose here, r-right…? Then… T-Two days ago, the day the motive was announced, I tried to reason with Yuri at the library to stop all the things she was doing.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I remember that. You said you had given up after the horrible things she said.”

Natsuki: “I…I wasn’t entirely truthful about what actually happened…”

Saiki: “...”

Natsuki: “Yes – I-I did argue with Yuri, but.. Yuri began to twist the argument. She told me I had become a target for the next murder because of what she had done in the previous trial…”

FLASHBACK

Natsuki: “Huh…? What’re you talking about?”

Yuri: “Unfortunately, everyone is aware of my intentions due to that trial. Because I want only you to live out of this nightmare, they all want to kill you to spite me.”

Natsuki: “N-No… No they don’t…! I’ve done nothing wrong!”

Yuri: “Exactly! Haven’t you seen how they’ve treated us since then?”

Natsuki: “That… That’s delusional, Yuri.”

Yuri: “Is it? Or… Perhaps there’s someone here who’s *already* planning to murder you?”

Natsuki: “W-What?! Who?”

Yuri: “ *Ena* .”

Natsuki: “Ena?! That’s crazy!”

Yuri: “Haven’t you seen what state Ena’s in? They can barely keep themselves together. If it were anyone to try to get you from sheer unpredictability, it’d be them. One wrong move, and they can snap. I’d hate to find out what they were capable of – especially on *you* . The fact that you two are partners in this motive scares me for that…”

Natsuki: “...N-No… I-I don’t want to be killed… Y-You’re making this up…”

Yuri: “Do you think I want to be telling you this, Natsuki? I want you to live more than anyone else on the island, anyone else on the planet. I want… I want to *save* you from this hell, and anyone who tries to lay a hand on you… You know that, don’t you?”

Natsuki: “I… I do… B-But… You can’t kill them… Everyone will know it was you… You’ll just be killing yourself…”

Yuri: “I… recognise that. Therefore, *you* need to attack first. It’s the only way you’ll be safe. If you did it, you’d be able to escape the island, and you would no longer have to worry about being stabbed in the back.”

Natsuki: “Me…? You’re telling me to kill someone…? I…I can’t do that. I can’t kill someone.”

Yuri: “I promise you, Natsuki, you won’t have to get your hands dirty. I have a plan, okay? I found some very intriguing berries while walking around the third island… They’re rather toxic in nature. It’d be the most harmless way of doing the job, right? No weapons, no strength, just some simple berries.”

Natsuki: “...What’s…What’s your plan?”

FLASHBACK END

Natsuki: “Y-Yuri had told me to find something to bake the berries into. I had considered making something for Ena alone, but I was afraid it’d look too suspicious. But, when the idea of the stand-up event came up…”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...E-Even when I did go through with it, even if I was scared for my life, even when I put my trust in Yuri, I… I felt *wrong* at every step. I felt like I was going to be sick.”

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps it was because of how friendly Ena was towards them proceeding her conversation with Yuri…”)

Natsuki: “And… that’s why I didn’t push Ena at the clocktower. I just… I just couldn’t do it. Yuri told me Ena would’ve been easy to push under the effects of the poison, but it felt as if my legs were locked in place. I refused at the last minute, so Yuri had to step in for me…”

Brian: “That’s…”

Natsuki: “ *Sniff* , I-I never wanted things to happen this way! I swear! I just–my head wasn’t thinking clearly at the time ‘cuz I was so stressed out over everything! I just wanted to leave! I thought it was the only possibility at the time to save myself! In reality I– *I wish I never even gave Ena that cupcake* –!”

Latte: “Natsuki…!”

Jesse: “Shit…! This can’t be real, man…”

Mai: “Oh, this is horrible…!”

L: “...So then, you confess to the murder of Ena.”

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...She’s already said enough. What’s even the point of her giving a clear confession…?”)

Monotora: “... *Ahem* , sob-fest aside, does this mean you’re all ready to vote now?”

Natsuki: “Vote–? N-No–d-don’t vote! Don’t kill me! P-Please! I didn’t mean to do this…!”

Jesse: “Hold on! We haven’t even talked about Yuri’s case!”

Monotora: “Yuri’s case? Kehehe, Yuri’s case don’t matter.”

Kurumada: “What the hell are you talking about?”

Monotora: “I mean, ya already gotten a confession outta the first killer, ain’t ya?”

Bojack: “ *First* killer?”

Monotora: “Jesus, did ya all hit your head as a cub? None of ya ever asked about the rule regardin’ the case of more than one killer, did ya?”

L: “It was something I was planning to ask in due time. However, I’m intrigued to hear it now, as you’ve brought it up.”

Monotora: “Y’see, in the event where there’s more than one murder in a single case, then only the first murder will be recognised for the trial – ergo only the first killer’s accounted for – and any proceeding ones are ignored. And that sure as hell goes for executions too!”

Brian: “So that’s why you said Yuri’s case doesn’t matter… As she have to have died after Ena, then whoever killed her won’t count towards the vote.”

Hayasaka: (“Even if the mystery of Yuri’s death still hangs in the air, does it really not matter? Is there no need to continue on? Do we… vote for Natsuki?”)

Natsuki: “No… N-No… You can’t–You can’t do this! I-I don’t even know why Yuri died! I don’t wanna die! Someone help me! Please– *save me* !!”

Jesse: “ *Natsuki* ! Shit – we–we gotta do somethin’!”

Bojack: “There’s not much we *can* do.”

Natsuki: “ *Sniff* …No…Please…”

…

Saiki: “ *...Why do you all think Ena died before Yuri* ?”

Hayasaka: “S-Saiki…?”

Kurumada: “Hate to break it to ya, kid, but Yuri was literally involved in pushin’ Ena at the clocktower. Clearly she was still alive then.”

Saiki: “ *Who said Ena died right there and then* ?”

Latte: “Huh? What does that mean, Saiki?”

Mai: “I thought we had come to the conclusion that Ena’s murder was merticulously planned so when they were pushed off the top of the clocktower, they would’ve succumbed to the poison at the same time.”

Saiki: “ *And how do we even know that* ?”

Brian: “...Are you telling us to give evidence of when Ena exactly died from the poison?”

Bojack: “Well that’s literally impossible.”

L: “Hmhm… How interesting…”

Hayasaka: (“...I’m just–I’m trying to understand what Saiki is getting at here… Hang on…”) “N-Natsuki, what time did you and Yuri leave the clocktower…?”

Natsuki: “Wha… U-Um, I don’t know exactly. It was probably a few minutes after 12A.M.? Y-Yuri must’ve left a little bit after I did…”

Hayasaka: “Ah… But then, if you two weren’t in the clocktower at the time, then… No, that doesn’t make any sense…”

Kurumada: “Eh? What’s wrong, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“...It’s because of that thing.”)

JESSE’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “According to Jesse… H-He said he heard mumbling coming from the clocktower at 12:30A.M…”

Brian: “Huh? But that’s thirty minutes after they left…”

Jesse: “It’s true, yo. But you can’t say it was Ena. The voice – it was feminine, I swear.”

Saiki: “ *But Ena’s voice swaps to feminine when they’re upset, anyway* .”

Natsuki: “I don’t… I don’t understand what you’re talking about. What’re you trying to say with this?”

Hayasaka: “I just… What if there’s a chance Ena was still alive *after* they had been pushed?”

Bojack: “ *Ptoo* –!”

Jesse: “What the hell, bitch?! You just spat on Mr. White’s portrait!”

Bojack: “Do you think I was planning to? You’re just dropping these twists left and right for God’s sake– *and* I was mid-sip on my scotch, alright?”

Hayasaka: (“A-At least he was facing away from Saiki and I…”)

Latte: “But surely no one could’ve survived from such a fall. Not even Ena.”

Mai: “And you have to take into account the use of the poison as well, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “I-I know, but…”

L: “...But he and Saiki are exactly right. I’m sure we can all agree that Ena was quite the anomaly in the group: not quite human, and rather something we couldn’t comprehend the inner workings of. Of course, for a human – or animal – they surely wouldn’t have survived such a thing. But can any of you confidently say Ena couldn’t?”

Brian: “When you put it like that… It does make sense in a way.”

Natsuki: “It can’t! Because I *saw* Ena fall! E-Ena was planned to die from the start!”

L: “Did you ever look at Ena before you left the clocktower?”

Natsuki: “N-No… I was too scared to look – I just ran past their body.”

Kurumada: “Shit, then who’s to say they *weren’t* dead?”

Mai: “You’re not saying you believe this as well, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “That–I dunno! It sounds kinda reasonable! And Hayasaka–!”

Bojack: “Who are you going to believe here? Some out-of-nowhere theories, or someone who was a literal witness to the death?”

Latte: “I… don’t know what to think. I just don’t want to doubt Natsuki after all the hardships she’s been through this trial…”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. Now we’re stuck in a split* –”

Monotora: “Oh-ho-ho! Split, did you say?”

Kurumada: “Damnit! Stop interferin’ – we’re in the middle of somethin’ here!”

Monotora: “Really now? Kehehe, don’t ya think it’s the perfect time for another scrum debate?”

Kurumada: “Fuck no!”

Monotora: “Well *too bad* ! You’re gettin’ one anyway!”

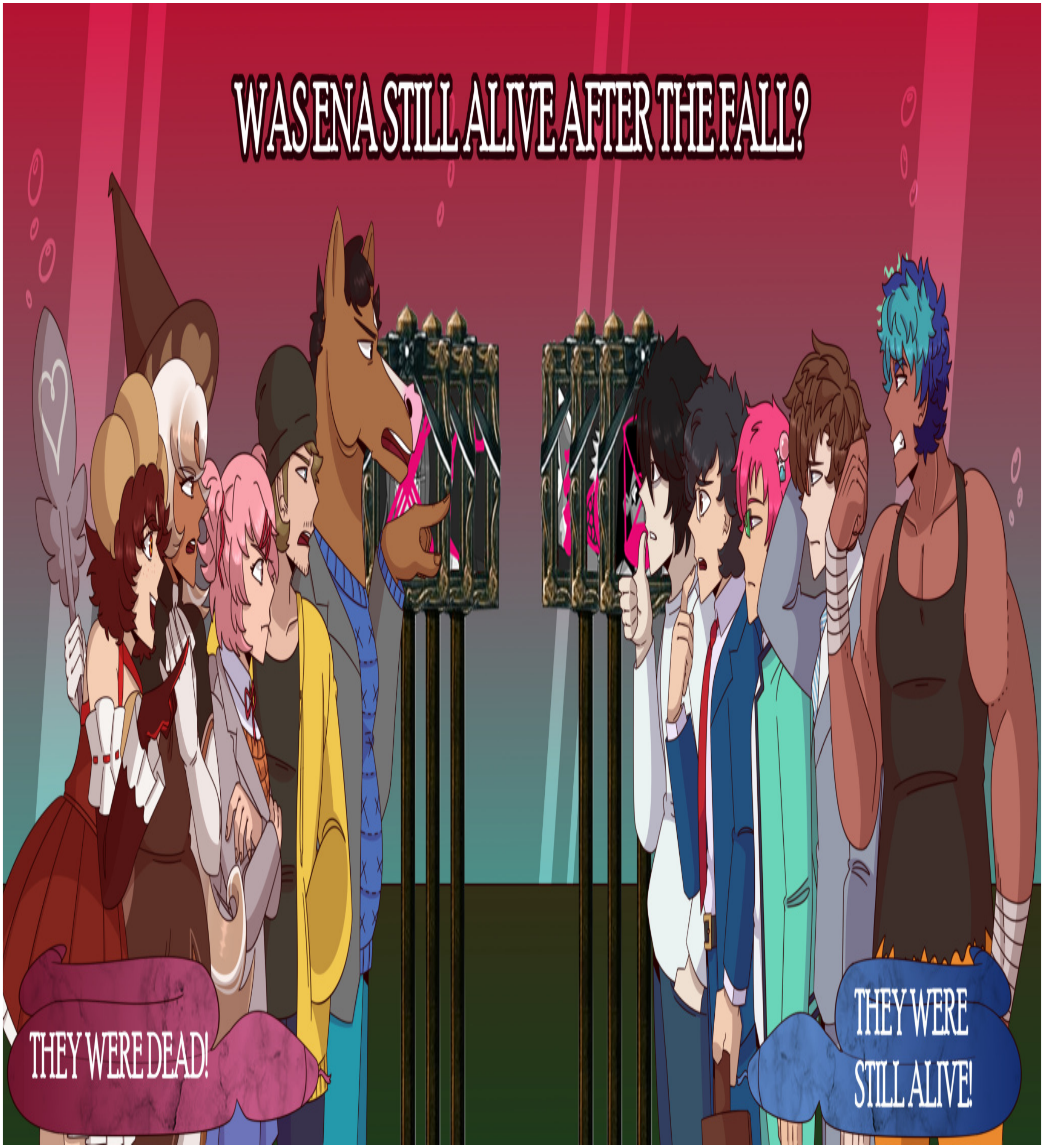
Brian: “I-I guess that’s one way of forcing it on us…”

Hayasaka: (“Hoo boy… I was a little deterred from my own theory, but now… is it something we can really ignore? Even so, it would be bad to back down now, h-haha…”)

SPLIT OPINION

-WAS ENA STILL ALIVE AFTER THE FALL?-

DEBATE SCRUM START


WAS ENA STILL ALIVE AFTER THE FALL?
THEY WERE DEAD!
THEY WERE STILL ALIVE!

Jesse: “How the hell could Ena survive a **fall** from that high up?”

Brian: “Ena didn’t die from the **fall** , though – it was from the poison.”

Mai: “But even so, the **poison** was timed to kill Ena at that moment, was it not?”

Kurumada: “Ena ain’t exactly human – maybe the **poison** didn’t work on ‘em that quick!”

Natsuki: “It was Yuri’s **plan** to have Ena die from that though!”

Saiki: “ *And yet her **plan** overlooked the possibility of Ena’s anomaly* .”

Bojack: “You can’t just say the **voice** Todd 2 heard belonged to Ena definitely.”

L: “By 12:30A.M. the only individual in the clocktower should’ve been Ena, therefore the only person who’s **voice** it could’ve been is theirs.”

Natsuki: “This doesn’t make any sense, anyway! I **witnessed** Ena dying!”

Hayasaka: “You only **witnessed** them fall – you had never checked them afterwards.”

Latte: “But we already have a confession from the **first killer**…”

Hayasaka: “No, there’s a chance Natsuki isn’t the **first killer**…!”

CROUCH BIND

THEY WERE STILL ALIVE

“This is our answer!”

FULL
COUNTER

BREAK

Jesse: “Wait… What’re you talkin’ about?”

Hayasaka: “If Ena didn’t take immediate effect from the poison, it allowed them to live longer than Yuri expected. And if you heard them at 12:30A.M., that means they must’ve died sometime after that.”

Saiki: “ *And that leaves a gap in time for Yuri’s death to occur* .”

Latte: “Really…?!”

Brian: “Ah, so if Ena died after Yuri, the first killer would actually be Yuri’s killer!”

Hayasaka: “Therefore, *not* Natsuki.”

Natsuki: “... *Huh* ? N-No way… Does that mean I… won’t die…?”

Bojack: “I don’t mean to rain on your parade, but we don’t actually know when Yuri died either. You can’t just bet on luck she died in that thirty minute time-gap.”

L: “But that’s exactly why it’s possible. You see, we weren’t provided the time of death for either victim in the Nesos Files because if Ena died before Yuri, there would’ve been no point in omitting them. Instead, it makes more sense to hide the fact that Yuri died before Ena as it would look highly suspicious once we had uncovered that Yuri had a hand in murdering Ena.”

Mai: “Oh my… Ah, now I feel so bad for doubting you, Hayasaka!”

Hayasaka: “Haha… I-It’s alright, Mai, really.”

Kurumada: “Ain’t ya gonna apologise to me too?”

Mai: “I’m sorry I didn’t realise you wanted an apology too, Kurumada!”

Kurumada: “What–?! That wasn’t what I meant!”

Jesse: “So–So Natsuki *ain’t* gonna die then?”

Natsuki: “I…I’m not? …Ah, oh my god–oh my god…”

L: “However, this does mean we will need to identify the culprit of Yuri’s murder.”

Brian: “I guess we do have to talk about her case after all, huh?”

Hayasaka: (“Yuri’s case… Where do we start with that?”)

L: “In spite of that, of course, there is always the slim chance that despite Natsuki and Yuri parting ways at the clocktower, the former may have been involved with the murder.”

Natsuki: “Are–are you kidding me?! How could you accuse me of killing Yuri?! I literally have no idea what happened to her – I really did go back to the hotel!”

Jesse: “There had to be people at the hotel at the time, y’know. Maybe someone saw her?”

Mai: “Oh, now that you mention it, I do remember seeing her at the hotel last night.”

Natsuki: “There! I-Is that enough proof for you? And you should’ve said that sooner!”

Mai: “My apologies…!”

Jesse: “Wait, what if it was Ena’s lil’ moon friend? Maybe they saw Yuri pushin’ Ena and went after her as revenge?”

Latte: “Did you see Moony arrive at the clocktower with Ena, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “Um, no, I don’t think I remember seeing her at all…”

Saiki: “ *Well there goes that theory.* ”

Bojack: “I’d like to believe this was caused by a person with an actual body, anyway.”

Monotora: “Man, why’d ya all care so much about some rock anyway? I could’a ate ‘em for all it matters!”

Brian: “Y-You ate her…?!”

L: “I highly doubt that. Monotora has previously expressed how they have no interest in ingesting something such as rock.”

Latte: “So, onto Yuri… How did she end up back at the library?”

Kurumada: “With the whole crazy ass way she died, there’s no way she could’a been killed anywhere else!”

Hayasaka: “That is true, haha… It’s unlikely she was transported. She must’ve been killed in the library.”

L: “Keep in mind also that we need to think about her actions less as a victim and more so as someone who had just committed a crime. It makes sense she would return to the library to clean up the evidence she previously left behind.”

Bojack: “Like the burnt books. Oh and also a whole unconscious woman.”

Latte: “Haha…”

Jesse: “Still, though… Isn’t it kinda weird for someone else to have just ‘coincidentally’ caught Yuri at the library and attack her?”

Saiki: “ *It wasn’t exactly a secret that she spent most of her time at the library* .”

Brian: “If someone was planning to kill her, it sort of makes sense they’d try to find her in her usual spot.”

Natsuki: “But… Wasn’t someone already at the library, anyway?”

Hayasaka: “Are you talking about Latte…?”

Latte: “Huh?”

Bojack: “Are you saying she woke up, killed Yuri and then remained in the library the whole night under the premise she was passed out the whole time? That’s just–wait, that actually sounds possible."

Mai: “That can’t be true! Latte didn’t even have a weapon with her, did you?”

Latte: “Ah, no. While I was cautious of Yuri, I wasn’t afraid of her. But anyway, I wouldn’t even need a weapon because I always carry around my spoon!”

Kurumada: “That’s still admitting ya had a weapon, y’know.”

Hayasaka: (“Not exactly, because we already know the weapon was something else…”)

KITCHEN KNIFE

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t think it’s possible that Latte was the killer. The actual killer should’ve brought a knife with them previously from the kitchen.”

Jesse: “How about the time Yuri literally handed her a knife?”

Brian: “But that was so she could return it to the kitchen.”

Bojack: “Did anyone actually watch her return it? She could’ve decided to keep it for all we know.”

L: “There wouldn’t be any motivation at that point in time for Latte to keep the knife, as she wouldn’t have been able to anticipate Yuri’s invitation to the library a day in advance. As well as that, we were all a witness to her receiving the knife regardless.”

Latte: “Does that mean I’m in the clear…?”

Natsuki: “So what the hell happened then?”

Saiki: “ *A fight, probably.* ”

Natsuki: “A fight? Where did *that* come from?”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: ("Saiki's looking at me… Wait, does he want *me* to present the evidence? Ah, well I suppose I don't mind…")

MARKS ON TABLE

Hayasaka: "Ah, um, we found scratch marks on a library table. Now that we know the knife was involved, those marks were most likely made by that."

Jesse: "Are we sure this ain't just Yuri scratchin' up shit herself again?"

Mai: "Although, Yuri had already given up her knife, hadn't she?"

Brian: "So the only person who should've had a knife at the time was the killer, which means a fight breaking out seems more possible."

L: "It was likely while Yuri was cleaning up evidence, the culprit went for the attack and the two began to struggle over the knife."

Kurumada: "Eh, that's weird. Why'd the killer even have to fight Yuri in the first place? She ain't exactly the strongest person in the group or nothin'."

Natsuki: "Gee, that's nice of you to say…"

Kurumada: "I'm just bein' realistic here!"

Bojack: "So if you're telling me this whole thing started at the tables, how did Yuri end up squashed under a bookshelf in a completely different area?"

Hayasaka: ("It does seem odd, but we need to understand how everything played out…")

NON-STOP DEBATE

L: “To figure out how Yuri died, we first must figure out the order of events of her injuries.”

Mai: “She had to be stabbed first and then crushed by the bookshelf, hm?”

Brian: “I guess it would’ve been impossible to stab her already underneath…”

Latte: “But then, which stab came first?”

Jesse: “Clearly she was stabbed through the hand and chest **all at once by the killer**!”

Saiki: “ *Is it even possible to stab someone like that* ?”

Kurumada: “Some crazy shit’s been pulled off in these cases so far.”

Natsuki: “I don’t care how much you hated Yuri – to do that is so freaking uncalled for!”

Hayasaka: (“...I don’t think such an option could’ve been possible.”)

YURI’S HAND AND CHEST WOUND

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “No, I don’t believe that was the case. Considering the fatalness of the wound, Yuri would’ve already died if she was stabbed like that.”

Jesse: “So what happened instead?”

Hayasaka: “The only possible way was that… Yuri must’ve been stabbed through the hand first, as the handle was against her palm.”

L: “The position of the knife also reveals that the culprit must’ve stabbed her during the struggle at the table. If you picture how the fight would’ve occurred, Yuri would have had her palms facing the culprit in order to defend herself.”

Bojack: “So killer stabs Yuri right through the hand – screams all around. Then what? The killer doesn’t have a weapon anymore; it’s literally inside Yuri.”

Kurumada: “The killer couldn’t pry it outta her, and she sure as shit wouldn’t! Wait, would she?”

Natsuki: “You really think Yuri was crazy enough to do that?! She was probably in too much shock to even think about taking it out!”

Hayasaka: “I-It would’ve also been smarter to keep it in – to take it out would deal in more blood loss, haha…”

Mai: “But what were the killer and Yuri to do next if they were both weaponless?”

L: “Let’s not think about it from the start, but the end. If we regard the outcome of Yuri’s death, then the events leading up to it will be easier to figure out.”

Brian: “Well, it had to have ended in the killer pushing the bookshelf on Yuri, right?”

Latte: “So somehow, the killer lured Yuri towards the bookshelf.”

Natsuki: “But if they didn’t have any weapons, it’s not like they could’ve chased them or anything.”

L: “Where would the culprit need to be positioned in order to push the bookshelf onto Yuri?”

Jesse: “Uh, behind the bookshelf?”

Saiki: “ *He didn’t mean literally* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah… they would have to be *in front* of Yuri.”

Kurumada: “What’d ya mean?”

Hayasaka: “Well, the only way the killer could’ve successfully gotten around to the bookshelf first if they were in front of Yuri to do so.”

Bojack: “So you’re saying Yuri chased the killer–or really the killer tricked Yuri into chasing them.”

Mai: “By running away first, the killer would’ve been able to direct Yuri right where they wanted her.”

Natsuki: “Wait–there’s something I just realised. How did the killer even manage to push over the bookshelf exactly?”

Latte: “Oh, you are right, Natsuki. Every shelf was packed with books, and we even needed Kurumada in order to lift up the bookshelf for us.”

Natsuki: “Exactly. So what made it so easy for the killer to do it?”

Bojack: “Well, there’s an obvious answer here… Like you said, Kurumada was able to lift it.”

Kurumada: “Seriously?! Are ya really gonna suspect me just ‘cuz of that?! Who says you couldn’t’a done it, then?”

Bojack: “Oh come on – I’m not *that* jacked-up.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, b-but that was an entirely different dilemma. Kurumada was *lifting* the shelf up, not pushing it down.”

Jesse: “Yeah, that’s like basic physics shit, right? It would’a been way easier to knock it down.”

Natsuki: “But it still doesn’t answer my question.”

Brian: “Mm… Oh! Wasn’t there something already off about that shelf?”

Hayasaka: (“Yes, there was, wasn’t there?”)

KNOCKED OVER BOOKSHELF

Hayasaka: “You’re referring to how that shelf had less books on it, right Brian?”

Brian: “Yeah. That means it would’ve made it a lot less heavy to push over.”

L: “That is most likely why the culprit utilised this particular bookshelf.”

Jesse: “Wait, so where’d all the books go?”

Mai: “I believe they must’ve been the ones Yuri used in her make-shift fire.”

Latte: “But, even when Yuri was crushed by the bookshelf, how do we know she died before Ena?”

Bojack: “Clearly she either died from suffocation or prolonged bleeding. Believe it or not, that takes time to kill someone.”

L: “However, there’s still one last injury to be accounted for: Yuri’s chest wound.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so how did that one happen…?”

Hayasaka: (“It had to be caused by the knife already lodged in her hand… But what…?”)

L: “If you think about it, it becomes obvious. What would you do if something was about to fall onto you?”

Kurumada: “Jump outta the way, obviously.”

L: “...Now think about it from the perspective of a teenage girl who does not have the equal reflexes of an athlete.”

Brian: “Oh… you’d put your hands out!”

Hayasaka: (“So if Yuri had attempted to brace herself… Ah!”) “T-The impact of the bookshelf must’ve caused the knife in Yuri’s hand to be pushed back into her chest…!”

Natsuki: “T-Thats–! Yuri really died like that…?!”

Saiki: “ *Because she was caught in an awkward position she couldn’t escape from, she probably died instantly.* ”

Jesse: “Jesus, that’s the most insane shit I’ve ever heard.”

L: “It isn’t impossible, however. And if everything occurred within the half hour time frame before Ena succumbed to the poison – which is plausible – it’s safe to say Yuri did indeed die before Ena.”

Latte: “Gosh, I would’ve never suspected such a thing…”

Kurumada: “Hell, at least the hard part’s over now. All we gotta do is figure out who the killer is, yeah?”

Bojack: “Sure thing, let me just take out my list of evidence that points to the killer and–oh it’s empty. Yeah, completely empty.”

Jesse: “Sarcastic asshole aside, Bojack’s right. I dunno if we even got any more clues left to get us a lead.”

Mai: “We aren’t completely lost, are we? After all, we were all still paired up at the time – that leaves any pairs that were on the second island at the time.”

Brian: “But wasn’t only Yuri and Latte on the second island?”

Natsuki: “Huh? You’re not saying… *Latte* killed Yuri?!”

Latte: “H-Huh? No, Natsuki, I had never intended to ever hurt Yuri what-so-ever!”

Kurumada: “Oi, what if it was Jesse n’ Bojack? We do know they were awake at the time!”

Jesse: “C’mon! It wasn’t us, man!”

Bojack: “Alright, if you want to fight petty, what’s stopping anyone on the first island being the culprit, huh?”

Kurumada: “‘Cuz it doesn’t make any sense!”

Latte: “I didn’t kill Yuri!”

Jesse: “Me n’ Bojack didn’t kill her!”

Kurumada: “No one on the first island could’a killed her!”

Hayasaka: (“N-Not again… Just when I thought we were calming down from before, it appears it’s a fight for where the culprit originally came from. I…I’m not certain myself as of quite yet, but perhaps if I just hear everyone out…”)

MASS PANIC DEBATE

Latte: “Please believe me Natsuki! I would never kill Yuri!”

Jesse: “It ain’t possible for me *or* Bojack to have done it!”

Kurumada: “Ya must be dreamin’ if ya think anyone on the first island could’a done it!”

Natsuki: “I… I don’t know what to believe! Do you have any proof you didn’t do it?”

Jesse: “We were around to hear Ena’s voice for God’s sake!”

L: “And why wasn’t it possible?”

Latte: “I couldn’t provide anything physical, but I promise you as a professor I would never inflict any harm upon a student!”

Bojack: “Also, we were completely wasted. I don’t even think we could’ve come up with that whole bookshelf thing that fast.”

Mai: “If any one of us attempted to leave, we would’ve been held back by our partner.”

Natsuki: “Nnn…!”

Bojack: “Actually, does being wasted count towards an alibi?”

L: “This wouldn’t stop anyone from **removing their handcuff** now, would it?”

Natsuki: “T-This is too stressful!”

Saiki: “ *Why did I even bother trying to listen to you two* …?”

Brian: “Well, it *would* kill their partner from the snap-back clause, a-actually…”

Hayasaka: (“...Could it have been possible? It’s not something we’ve even discussed the possibility of yet, but…”)

MARKS AROUND PARK TREE

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “What if… What if *someone else* had managed to figure out a way to break out of their handcuff?”

Natsuki: “Huh? But I thought we only found Yuri’s handcuff broken.”

L: “A handcuff didn’t necessarily have to be broken to be able to escape from it, you see. Perhaps you were only led to believe it that way from Yuri’s method.”

Latte: “Is there any evidence to prove it was possible, though?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I think so. There was something strange Saiki and I stumbled upon at the park… marks around a tree. At first, I wasn’t sure what it was from, but it had to have been made from a rope-like material being tied around it.”

Jesse: “So? What does that even gotta do with this?”

Saiki: “ *...Someone tied their handcuff to that tree.* ”

Kurumada: “What?!”

L: “If you combine the possibility of someone escaping their handcuff and the knowledge that something was tied to that tree, it’s the only item that would’ve ever needed to have been kept in place.”

Brian: “Oh, because if it wasn’t tied up, then it would’ve snapped back to their partner…!”

Hayasaka: “It would have also allowed them to return to their handcuff later so they could put it back on.” (“That meant it was possible for someone not on the second island to be able to travel there… B-But…”)

L: “Consequently, this implies that the culprit’s partner was still on the first island, therefore the culprit can only be someone from a pair that was situated on the first island the previous night: Hayasaka and Saiki, Kurumada and Mai, or Brian and I.”

Bojack: “You even included yourself you crazy bastard…”

Natsuki: “But that means one of you six killed Yuri…!”

Mai: “Perhaps there’s been some sort of mistake? I could never believe any of us would’ve done it!”

Kurumada: “Yeah, same here! And you don’t got any evidence to prove anyone escaped their cuff, anyway!”

Latte: “And since any of them could’ve taken the knife from the kitchen, the weapon choice doesn’t help either.”

L: “...As no evidence was left indicating how the culprit escaped their handcuff by damaging them, then why don’t we flip this logic on its head? Instead of the culprit damaging the handcuff, the culprit damaged *themself* .”

Hayasaka: “Y-You mean… the killer shaped their hand to slip out of their handcuff?”

Jesse: “Y’mean like they crushed their hand or somethin’?”

Natsuki: “What the–?! That’s taking it too extreme!”

Mai: “Oh, maybe they used some sort of lubrication to make their hand slippery?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t think that works on handcuffs* .”

Brian: “Um… Oh! Hey, do you remember that book club we had a while ago?”

Natsuki: “Why’re you bringing up the book club? That happened way before this case, you dummy!”

Brian: “I-I know that! It’s just, I remember that plot point Yuri mentioned in her book…”

Hayasaka: (“That plot point…?”)

FLASHBACK

Brian: “...What’s your book about then, Yuri?”

Yuri: “It’s…It’s about this group of people who are looking for this comic that is rumoured to have predicted the future on a horrible dystopia. However, an organisation has also been trying to track down the comic too. Right now I’m at this one part where one guy has been caught by two men and questioned in his basement. They start to torture him by pouring all sorts of powders into his eyes, and eventually one of the men scoops out one of his eyes with a spoon. However, he manages to escape his handcuffs by dislocating his thumb and–...”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “T-That… Brian, you’re talking about how a character had dislocated their thumb in order to escape handcuffs, aren’t you?”

Brian: “I mean–I’ve never *actually* seen something like that been done before, but….”

Bojack: “That’s probably because it was in a book. You know, a fictional book.”

L: “However, if you recall the dilemma where the culprit had engaged in a struggle with the defenceless Yuri, it lines up why it had occurred in the first place. If the culprit had a handicap – say the dislocated thumb – there would have been the added challenge of using the knife as you’d require a stable thumb to wield it effectively.”

Natsuki: “So that’s why Yuri was even able to fight back…”

Saiki: “ *It wouldn’t have been hard for the killer to hide their thumb either, just by not drawing any attention to it* .”

Jesse: “Alright, so we just gotta figure out who would even do that.”

Kurumada: “Oi, Brian, you’re always carryin’ that briefcase – maybe ya hiding ya thumb underneath it?”

Brian: “W-What?! N-No!”

Hayasaka: (“Someone dislocated their thumb…? It sounds rather absurd, doesn’t it? After all, who would even… Ah. *Ah* . No… N-No that–that isn’t possible–Hayasaka what is wrong with you they can’t be… C-Can they…? No, I-I’ll just keep quiet…”)

L: “...Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: (“No…! Please don’t draw attention to me–!”)

Kurumada: “Huh? Hayasaka, what’s wrong?”

Mai: “If you know something, dear, don’t be afraid to tell us.”

Hayasaka: (“Why…? Why me…?”)

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “...A-Are you the killer? … *Mai* ?”

Mai: “...”

Latte: “Huh? M-Mai?!”

Kurumada: “What the fuck is this?! Is this some sorta sick joke, Hayasaka?!”

Hayasaka: “N-No–No! I-I–There’s an obvious reason it points to her, isn’t there? H-Her gloves…!”

Brian: “Her… her gloves?”

Hayasaka: “Since–since Mai’s hands are always covered by her gloves, there’s no possible way we’d be able to tell if her thumb had been dislocated or not, d-due to the mould of the gloves, unlike the other five suspects whose hands are bare…”

Mai: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Please, Mai… Say something… *Anything* …”)

Mai: “...That reasoning is a bit far-fetched, isn’t it now, Hayasaka? If anything, I think you’re simply stressed out from the longer than usual trial. I wouldn’t blame you for coming to such a conclusion because of that.”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?”

Mai: “Haha, what’s next? Are you going to accuse me of taking the knife from the kitchen simply because I’m a baker?”

Hayasaka: “T-That…”

Mai: “Ah dear, there’s no actual evidence the killer even dislocated their thumb, either. It was just a coincidental theory to explain why the killer *could* have struggled against Yuri. But in reality, it was more likely that the killer was just weak, something I regard myself as not–”

Kurumada: “If you think your so strong, then why didn’t ya take up my offer this mornin’...?”

Mai: “... *Huh* ? What… Kurumada what’re you talking about–”

Kurumada: “This mornin’, you n’ Hayasaka visited me in the gym, and I invited you up to the punchin’ bag.”

FLASHBACK

Mai: “Tsk, you’re so rude.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Then how ‘bout you have a spin at it, if you’re so insistent.”

Mai: “Oh, no, no. A lady should not be made to do such a heavy task.”

Kurumada: “Aw, c’mon. Ladies can do whatever they want to. Surely you outta all people would jump at an opportunity like this.”

Mai: “I appreciate the offer, but I don’t want to do it, anyhow.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“That…”)

Kurumada: “You said you ‘didn’t want to’. But… It was ‘prolly ‘cuz you *couldn’t* from an injury. Hell, I even found it suspicious back then why ya refused…”

Mai: “I don’t understand… Are you suspecting me right now, Kurumada? Mere moments ago you had just called Hayasaka’s accusation against me a ‘sick joke’.”

Kurumada: “...I did believe ya at first – that maybe Hayasaka really was just stressed outta his mind from the heavy case – but when you started attackin’ him with all those questions, that wasn’t like you. It wouldn’t be like you at all to lose your cool if you were innocent.”

Mai: “T-That is–! Gh…”

Natsuki: “Hey, hang on! Are you two saying that Mai killed Yuri…?”

L: “If you are, then by what we’ve discussed before, Mai would be the candidate for the vote.”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah…! No, I–Please forget everything that I said! I-I’m sorry for even bringing such a thing up…!”

L: “Or are you simply saying that because she’s your friend…?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “What the fuck is wrong with you?! There’s no way in hell Mai’s the killer! ‘Cuz despite my suspicions, she ain’t even got any connection to Ena’s case at all, let alone be holdin’ any grudges against Yuri unlike the one everyone else holds anyway!”

Latte: “I don’t want to believe it, either!”

Saiki: “ *Are we even sure about that* ?”

Jesse: “Actually, we never even talked about why the killer actually like, killed Yuri in the first place.”

Bojack: “If everything took place on the second and third island, how would the killer even be aware of anything if they were on the first?”

L: “Either something must have caught their attention enough to want to investigate, or they already retained the knowledge that something dangerous was happening, hence why they took the knife with them.”

Brian: “But what? There wasn’t anything on the first island that could’ve prompted them.”

L: “Then think back to how Ena was convinced to go to the clocktower.”

Hayasaka: “...Y-Yuri’s poem.”

Kurumada: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: “It was read aloud publicly… Who’s to say no one else had picked up on its meaning at the time?”

Natsuki: “But I thought the whole point was that only Ena would’ve understood it.”

L: “Yes, Yuri was banking on that, but it wasn’t impossible for anyone else to decipher it as well, considering we all managed to figure it out in the trial. Furthermore, someone of the romantic type like Mai should’ve had no trouble deciphering the poem.”

Hayasaka: “But that… that means it was possible that–”

Mai: “Cut this nonsense out!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “M-Mai…?!”

Mai: “Hayasaka… You said you had taken back your accusation on me. So why’re you acting as if you suspect me again?”

Hayasaka: “I… Mai, I-I don’t–”

Mai: “Please don’t believe them. You know it’s impossible for me to be the killer.”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Mai: “To accuse anyone else of understanding the poem’s message would be pointless. The only person who should’ve been concerned with the message is Ena.”

Hayasaka: “B-But the message itself would’ve warranted enough worry that Yuri was planning to do something. If anything, their guard should’ve been up even on the first island to keep watch for any potentially suspicious actions.”

Mai: “That may have been possible to a degree. But for me? I **never saw any suspicious events** occur at all! So how could I have even been persuaded to do anything?”

NATSUKI’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the lie!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Mai… T-That’s a blatant lie.”

Mai: “...What?”

Hayasaka: “Don’t you remember what you said earlier…?”

FLASHBACK

L: “In spite of that, of course, there is always the slim chance that despite Natsuki and Yuri parting ways at the clocktower, the former may have been involved with the murder.”

Natsuki: “Are–are you kidding me?! How could you accuse me of killing Yuri?! I literally have no idea what happened to her – I really did go back to the hotel!”

Jesse: “There had to be people at the hotel at the time, y’know. Maybe someone saw her?”

Mai: “Oh, now that you mention it, I do remember seeing her at the hotel last night.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “You claimed to have seen Natsuki at the hotel. But, as we know, Natsuki wasn’t there the whole night. In fact, it makes more sense you saw her *arrive back* at the hotel sometime after 12A.M. There’s no possible way you would’ve ignored her shaken demeanour.”

Mai: “...”

L: “Knowing that something must’ve occurred at the clocktower due to the poem, that was most likely the first place you went after leaving the first island.”

Natsuki: “Wait, but that means she would’ve seen Ena…!”

Brian: “But if Natsuki was already gone then… had she mistaken Ena’s killer for Yuri?”

Bojack: “She probably then followed Yuri back to the library to confront her about the murder. Or just straight up attack her in this case.”

Latte: “No…! It can’t be true! I refuse to believe such a sweet person as Mai would commit such a horrible crime! This whole thing about the dislocated thumb hasn’t even been proven at all!”

Jesse: “That was kinda a shot in the dark, y’know.”

L: “Then all Mai would have to do to prove us wrong would be to remove her gloves and present both her thumbs perfectly intact, or at least a valid explanation as to why it was broken otherwise.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, y-yes, that’s it… That’s all Mai needs to do. Show us your hands, Mai. If you show us your thumbs are fine, then there’s no need to suspect you anymore… Haha, s-she’ll be fine after all, and this sinking feeling in me will finally go away…”)

Mai: “...”

Hayasaka: “... *M-Mai* ?”

Kurumada: “Mai, what the hell are you doing?! At least say somethin’, damnit!”

Mai: “...I–”

Latte: “Hang on! It was impossible for Mai to have even seen Natsuki on the first island!”

Mai: “Latte…?”

Latte: “Earlier on in the trial, Natsuki confessed that her link with Ena had been removed when they died. But, that was *before* we figured out Ena died after Yuri! If Ena was still alive at the time, then her link with Ena wouldn’t have been removed at all!”

Kurumada: “Shit–yeah, you’re right! Then there’s no way Natsuki could’a went to the first island without her cuff explodin’!”

Bojack: “But why would Mai even claim to have seen Natsuki at the hotel then?”

Latte: “She must’ve been defending her! I would’ve done the same!”

Saiki: “ *You would’ve lied in a trial* ?”

Brian: “But if Natsuki never went back to the hotel, then…”

Natsuki: “W-What? N-No, it’s really what happened! I really did go back to the hotel! The link between me and Ena really *did* break and even I don’t understand why that happened now! It’s the reason I was convinced Ena really was dead at the time!”

Jesse: “C’mon – Natsuki’s told the entire truth on her end! Do you really think she has anything left to hide now?”

Hayasaka: (“W-What? What’s going on…? I can’t… I can’t focus anymore…”)

L: “...I wonder something. Did Nesos know the order of the deaths the whole time?”

Monotora: “...Whuzzat now?”

Kurumada: “Clearly they fuckin’ did! That’s why they left it outta the files to hide the mystery of the order!”

L: “Yes, I am aware of that, but that doesn’t necessarily mean the file was conceived right after the murders. Just like with Walter’s murder, and with Retsuko’s, whoever was watching the cameras had to have been studying the entire case in order to produce the file accurately and omit certain mysteries their culprits had left behind.”

Hayasaka: “*... That means they could’ve gotten something wrong, too* .”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka…?!”

L: “As with Natsuki and Yuri, Nesos could have assumed Ena had succumbed to the poison at that point and removed the link between them and Natsuki, only to witness Ena’s *true* death half an hour later.”

Brian: “W-Wait, does that mean… Nesos made a *mistake* ?”

Monotora: “...Eh, we never thought you’d figured it out. I must confess, we made a lil’ oopsie on our behalf. Y’see, it *did* look like ol’ picasso had died at the time, but it was sorta hard to tell, kehehe!”

Kurumada: “You–You *bastards* ! What gives you the right to be so goddamn careless when ya keep claiming to make these trials as fair as possible?!”

L: “But it’s not just that. Monotora’s confession there has thus confirmed Ena did indeed die later on, and so we can conclude with confidence that Yuri’s killer is the one to be accounted for, or in other words, Mai.”

Mai: “...”

Hayasaka: (“No… N-No…”)

Mai: “... *Hehe* .”

Kurumada: “Mai…?”

Mai: “Ah, curse this company for being such slackers that I can’t even save everyone correctly. Or… perhaps they did that on purpose to damn me.”

Hayasaka: “Mai… M-Mai, what’re you…?”

RUFFLE

Mai: “Mm… It’s been killing me this whole time. Going through so much to do that just to be found out is rather depressing on my end… haha.”

Latte: “Oh my *goodness* …! Mai, your thumb…! *Sniff* , n-no…!”

Kurumada: “... *No…Damnit* …”

Hayasaka: “...”

Natsuki: “...Huh? Does this mean you’re… confessing to Yuri’s murder?”

Mai: “Hehe, what do you think I’m doing? If the order of deaths have truly been confirmed, then I have no reason to hide anymore and let everyone vote incorrectly.”

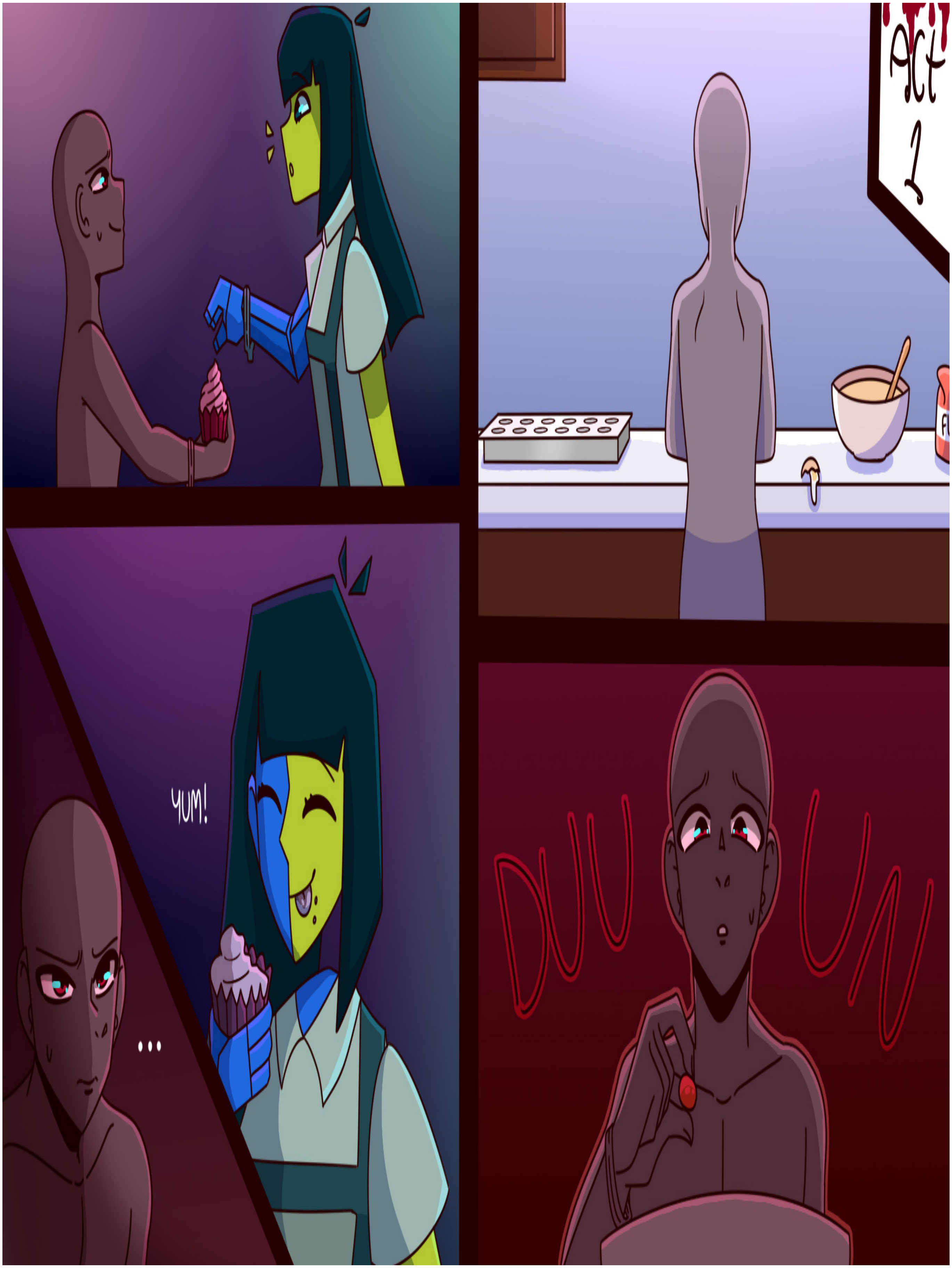
Kurumada: “Mai, don’t… don’t ya dare fuckin’ do this–!”

Mai: “L, I have a request to make, if you don’t mind. Is it possible for you to run through the entire case once more to fully convince everyone of what happened? I don’t want things to turn out badly otherwise.”

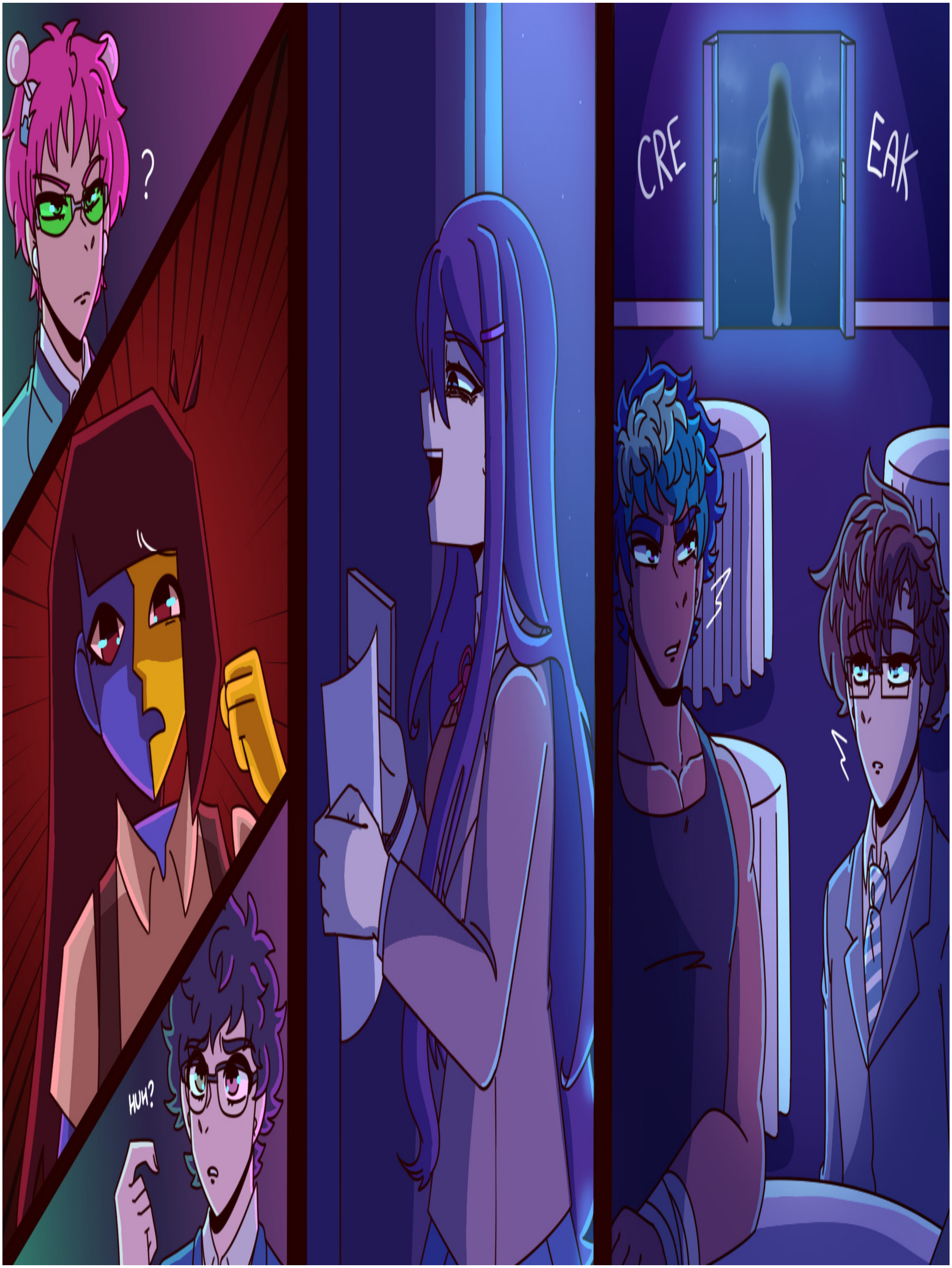
L: “...I see. If you wish.”

Hayasaka: “...”

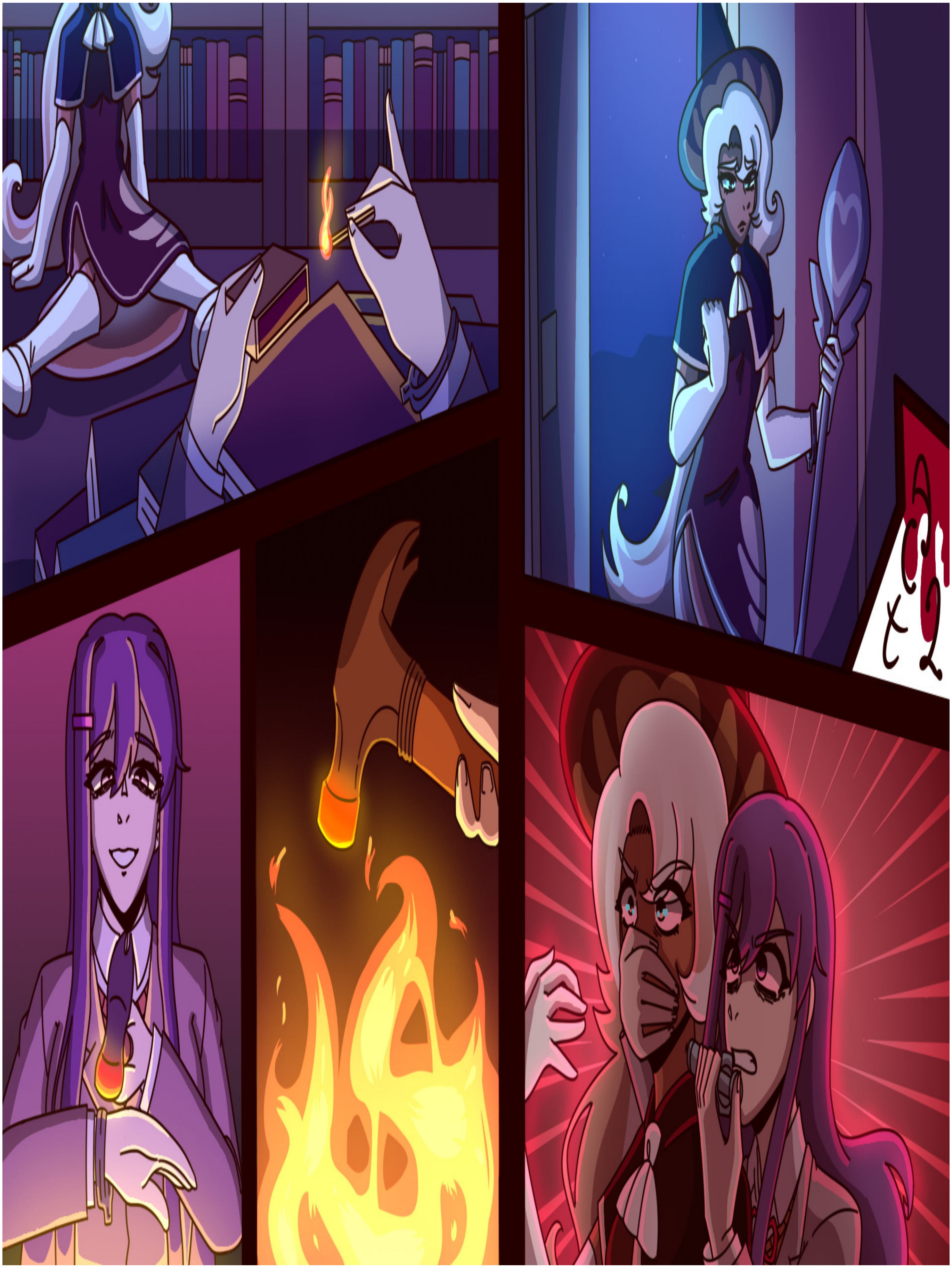
CLOSING ARGUMENT


YUM!
...
Act 1
FL
DUU UN

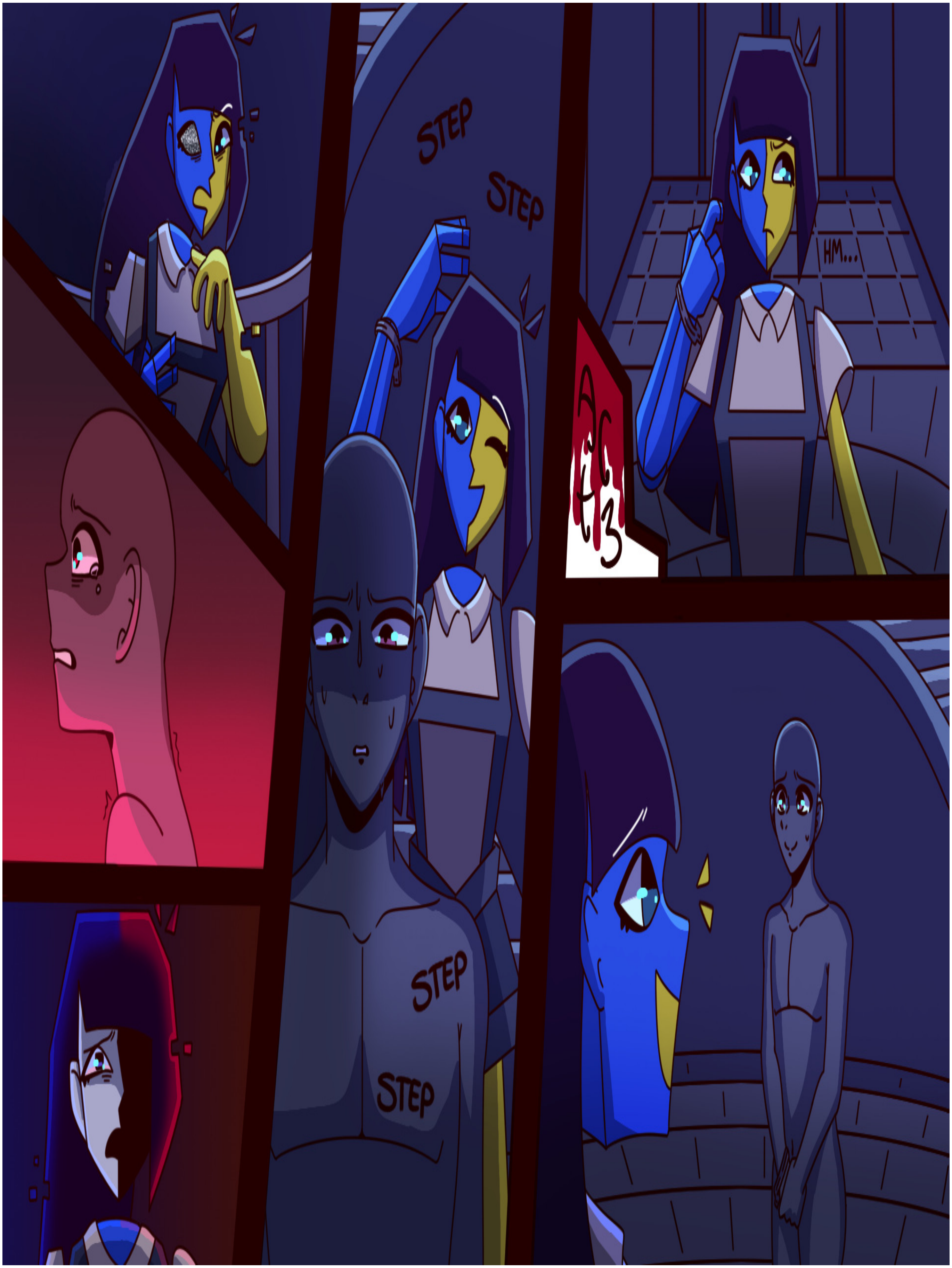
L: “This case all began when Yuri had manipulated the culprit into getting involved with her murder plan to kill Ena. The culprit had been tasked to find a way to convince Ena to ingest strychnine berries, in which they decided to bake them into a cupcake batch they were to serve at the venue later on that evening. As Ena and the culprit had gotten close over the past day or so, Ena would have no reason to suspect anything off with the cupcake they had handed to them and ate the poisoned treat without a second thought, solidifying their death to come.”


?
HUH?
CRE
EAK

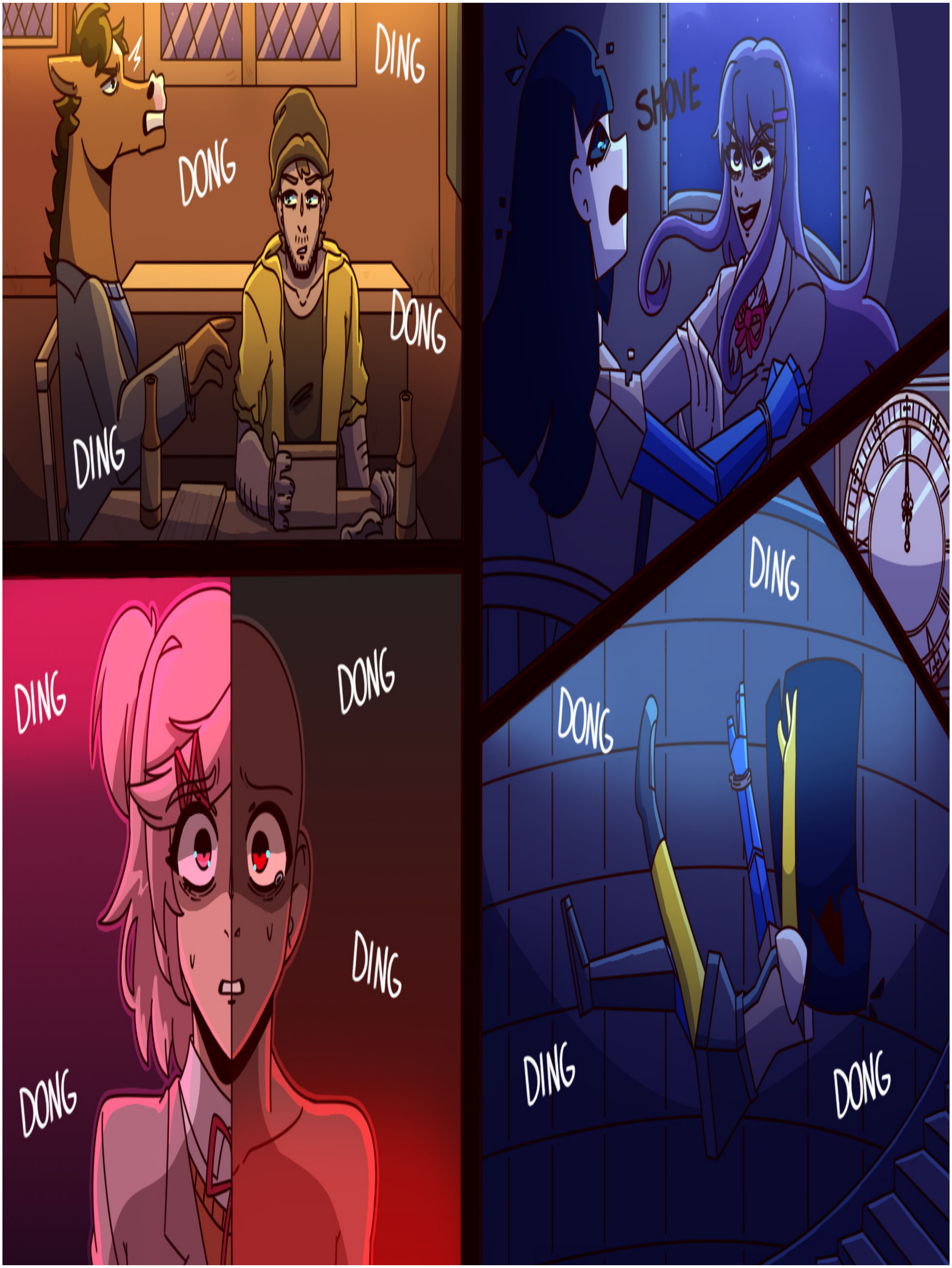
L: “At one point during the venue, Yuri had arrived to everyone’s surprise and recited a cryptic poem. However, underneath her words lied a message directed at none other than Ena. Believing the culprit’s life to be in danger, Ena was convinced they were the only one who could save them.”



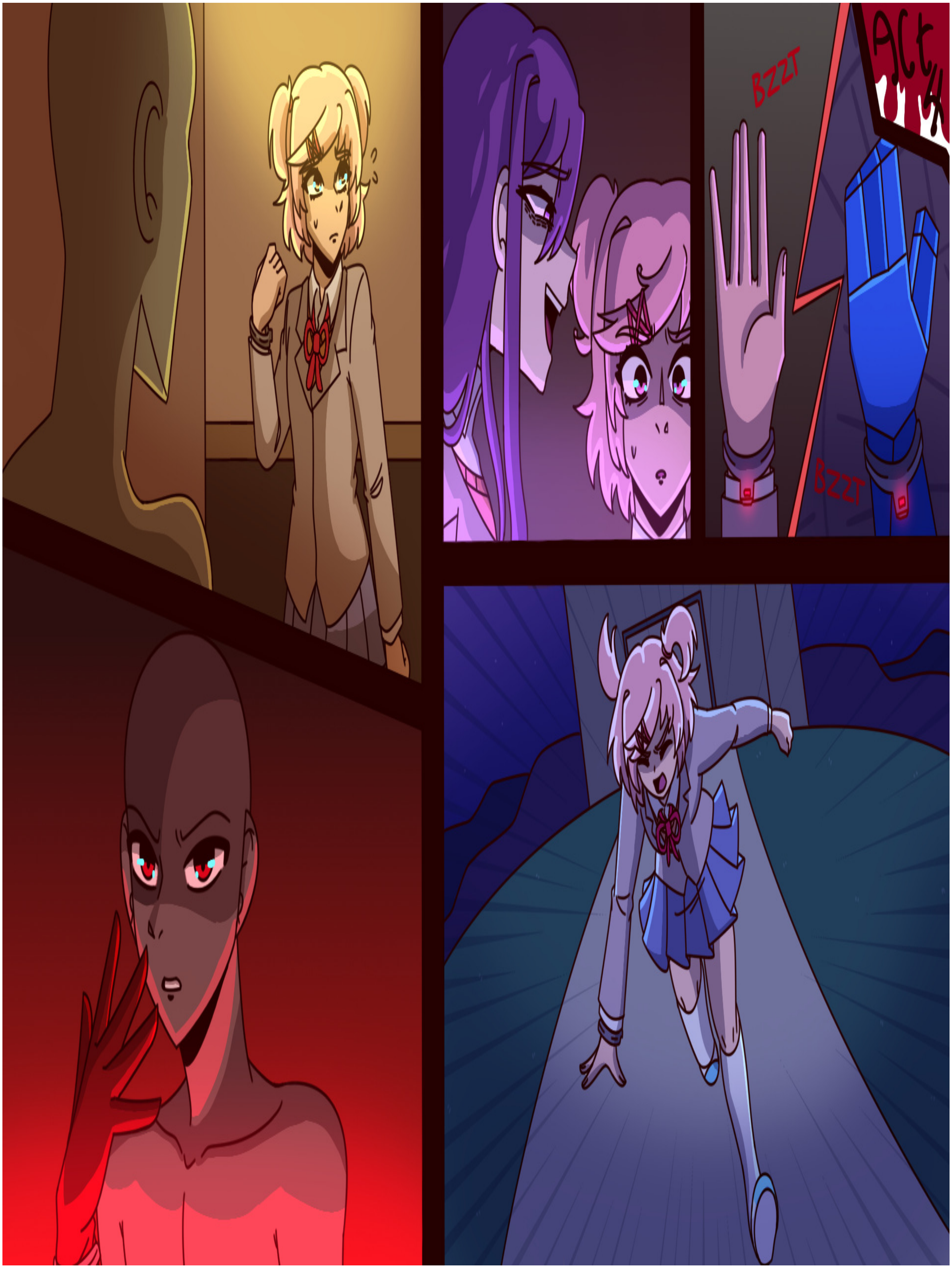
L: “Later that evening once everyone had disbanded from the stage bar, Latte had arrived at the library at 11:30P.M. as per Yuri’s request. However, the moment she stepped through the door, Yuri striked, stabbing her neck with a needle full of anaesthetic and knocking her out before she could have the opportunity to fight back. She then moved Latte further into the library where she had set up a pile of books taken from a bookshelf. With the toolbox and box of matches she had brought to the library beforehand, Yuri then set fire to the books, held a hammer over the fire and smelted her handcuff off. This was all to break her connection with Latte so she could move to the third island without being tied down to the motive. And, as the handcuff’s weakness was heat, Yuri’s handcuff had lost its functionality, allowing Latte to be saved from the snap-back clause.”


STEP
STEP
HM...
Act 3
STEP
STEP

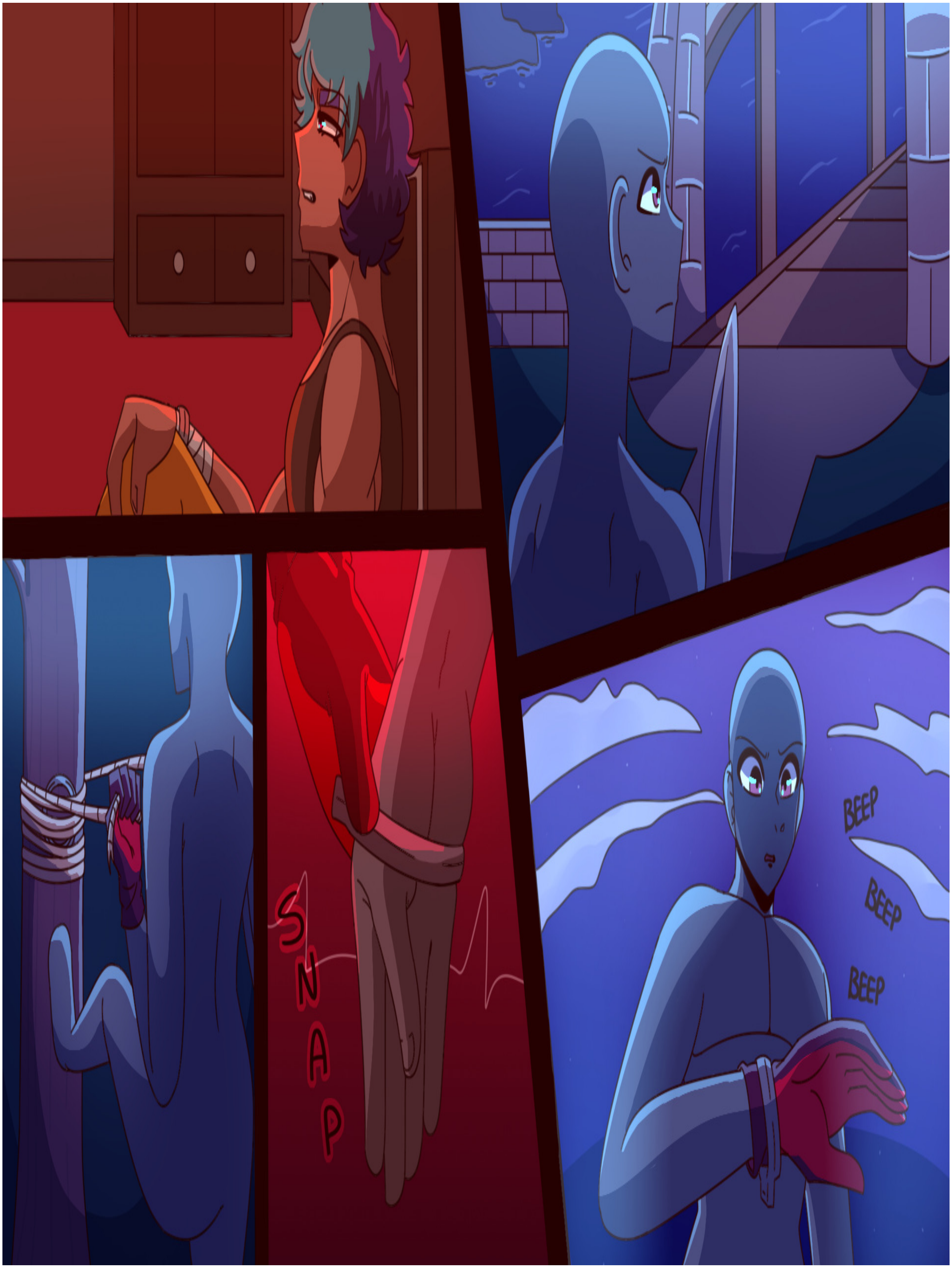
L: “Just a few minutes before midnight, Ena had arrived at the clocktower, as per the poem’s inferred location and time. They must’ve seen the culprit nearby, who then led them up the stairs to the top of the clocktower. At this point, Ena would’ve begun to show the symptoms of the poison to a fatal degree – and this was when the culprit was supposed to push them off the tower. However, the culprit became hesitant, and upon witnessing their distress, Ena was triggered into their sad state.”


DING
DONG
DONG
DING
SHOVE
DING
DONG
DING
DONG
DING
DONG
DING
DONG

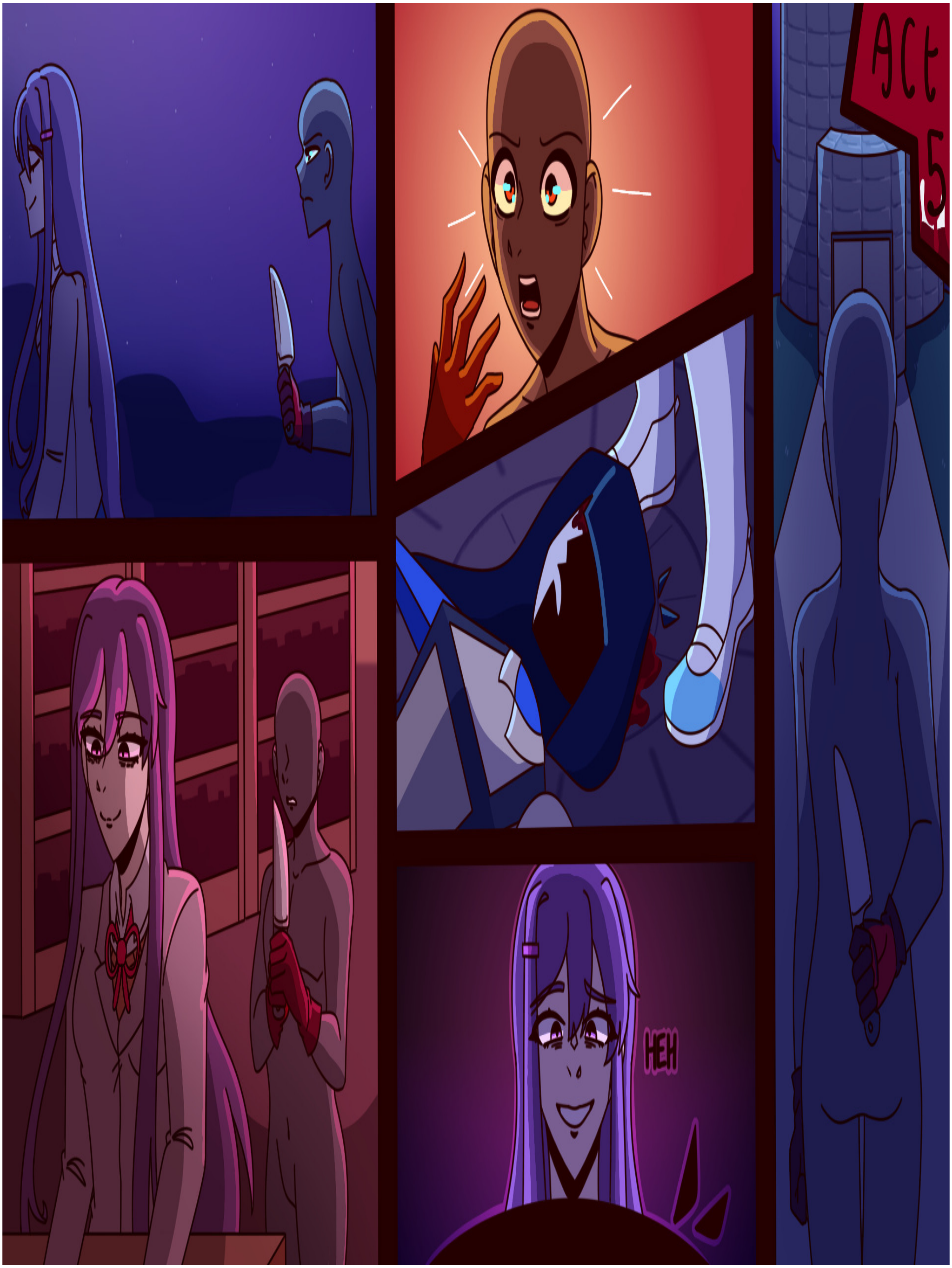
L: “As the culprit had refused to move, Yuri took the initiative herself, pushing Ena off of the top of the clocktower just as it turned midnight. This was so the executive chimes of the clocktower would play over the sound of Ena screaming and hitting the floor once they had plummeted down. Of course, the only reason this was even possible for Yuri to do was that she had planned for Ena to succumb to the poison just before the fall could kill them – solidifying the culprit, *Natsuki* , as the true murderer.”


BZZT
Act 4
BZZT

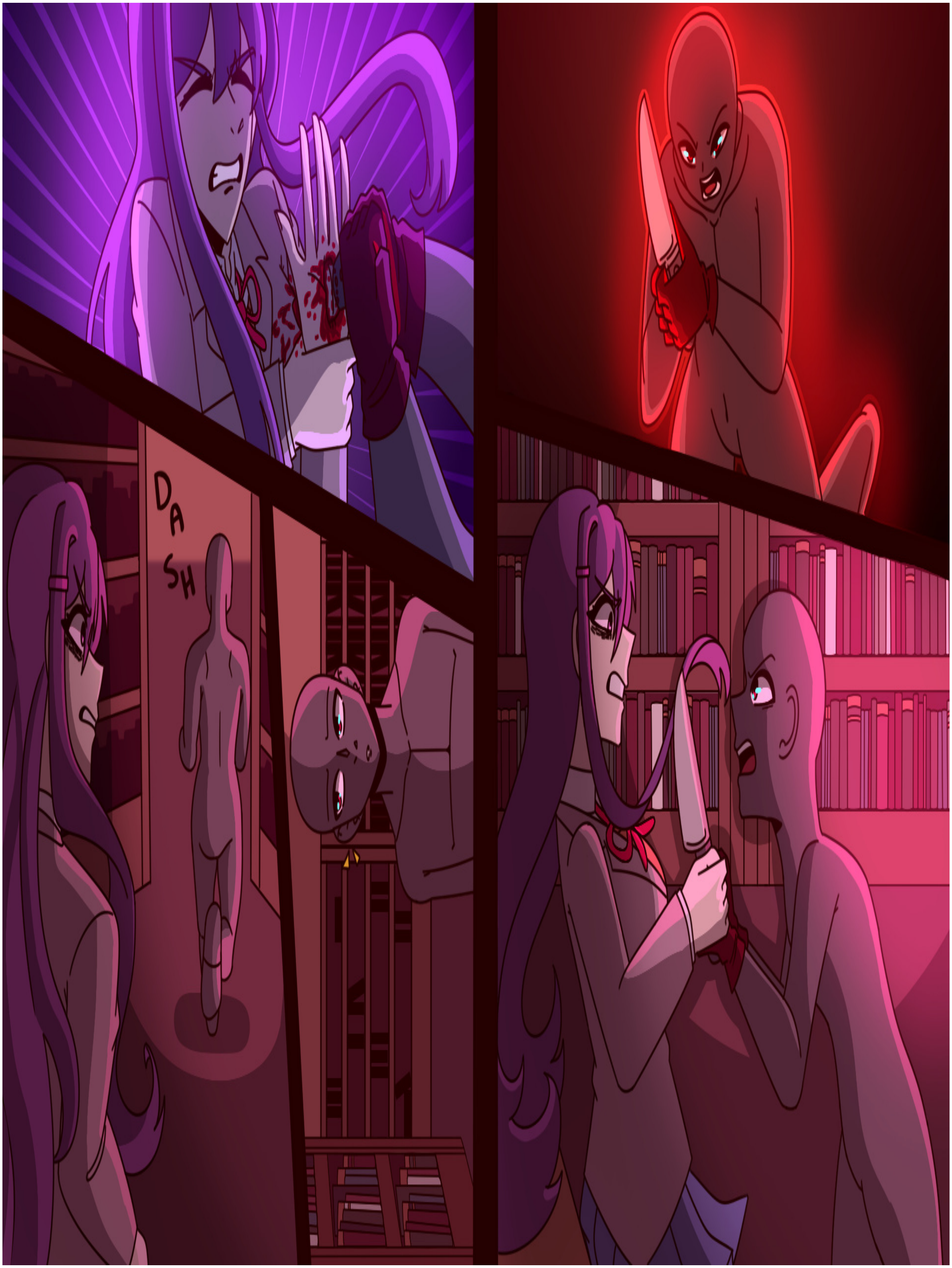
L: “Yuri then instructed Natsuki to run back to the first island as the link between Ena and Natsuki’s handcuffs had been removed following Ena’s death. However, this is when our *second* culprit is introduced. This culprit had also picked up on the meaning of Yuri’s poem, causing them to have kept their guard up for any suspicious behaviour while being confined to the first island due to their partner. Once they had witnessed Natsuki returning to the hotel and seeing her shaken state, they could no longer be compelled to stay put.”


SNAP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP

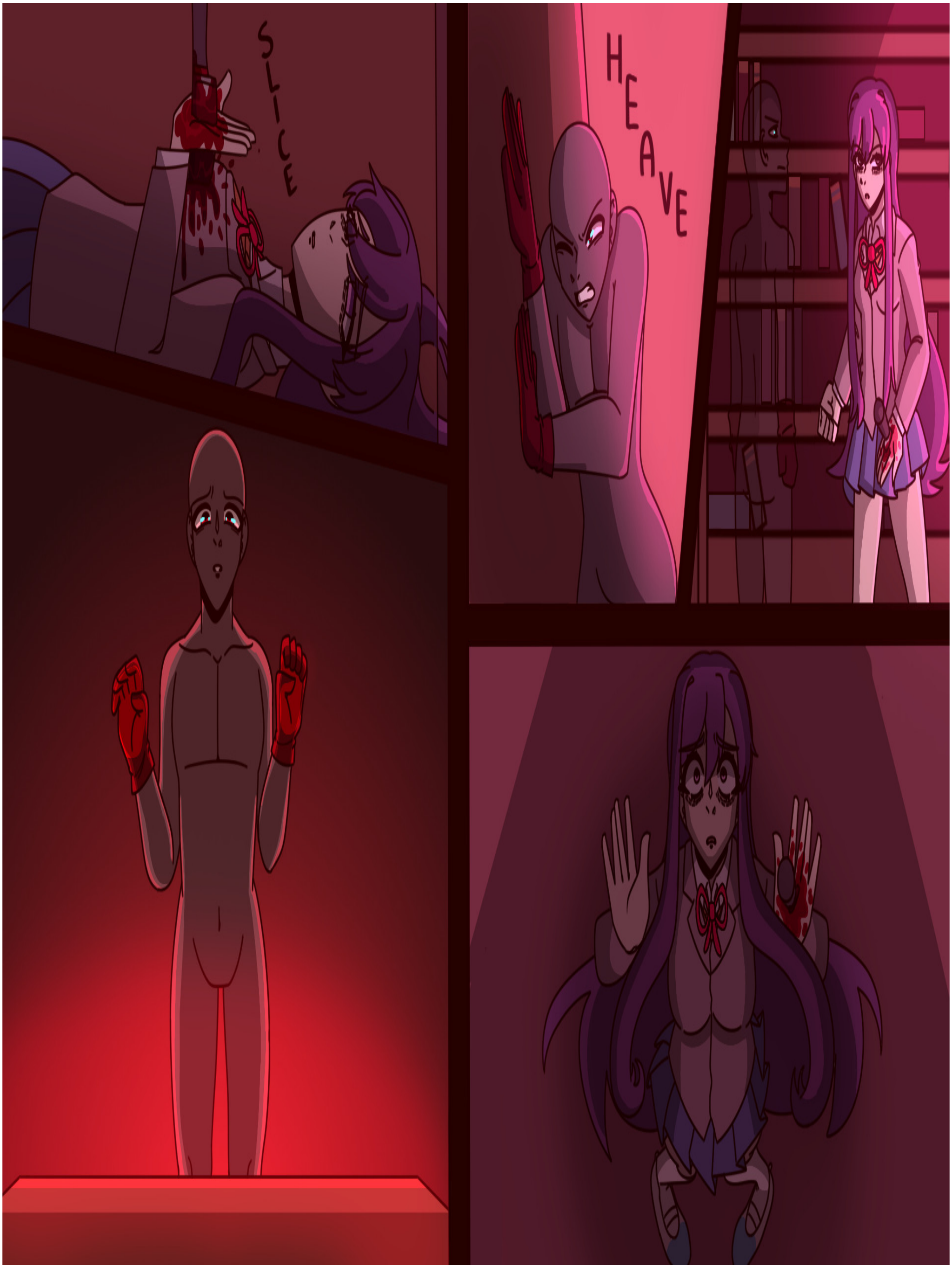
L: “However, in order to even be able to move to any other islands, the culprit had decided the only way they were to escape their handcuff was to dislocate their thumb in order to slip out of the restraint. Unlike Yuri’s escape method that rendered her handcuff useless, the culprit’s was still intact, and so in order to not let it snap back to their partner, they had tied to a nearby tree in the park. With a knife in hand taken from the kitchen in the knowledge of the potentially dangerous situation, the culprit left the first island.”


Act 5
HEH

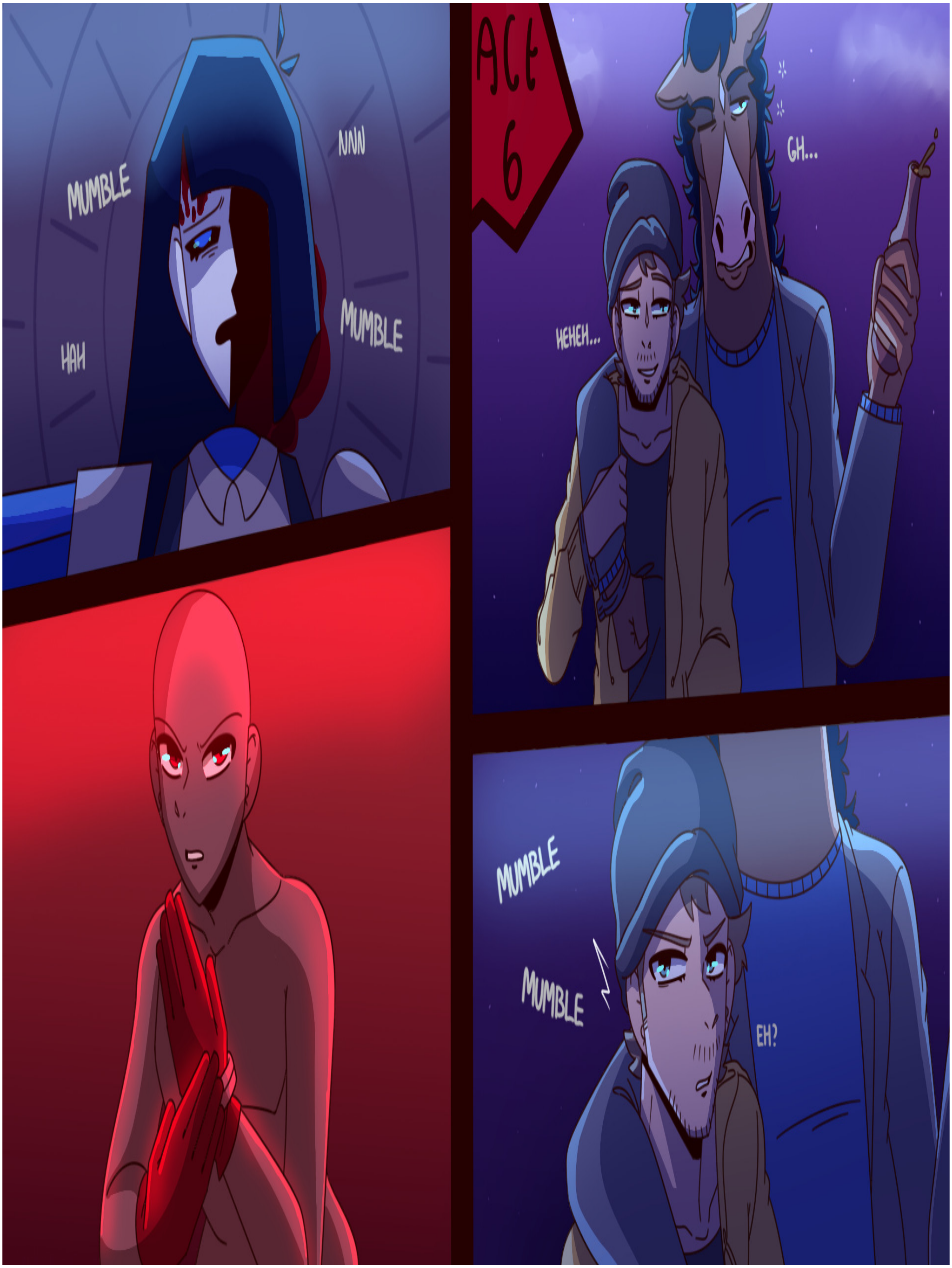
L: “The location the culprit ventured to was the clocktower, seeing that was the only piece of evidence they could go off from by the poem. There, they must’ve witnessed Ena’s bloody body lying in the middle of the clocktower, and Yuri closeby. Believing she was the one to have killed Ena, they followed Yuri back to the library where she had planned to clean up the remaining evidence. This is when the culprit attacked her with the knife.”


DASH

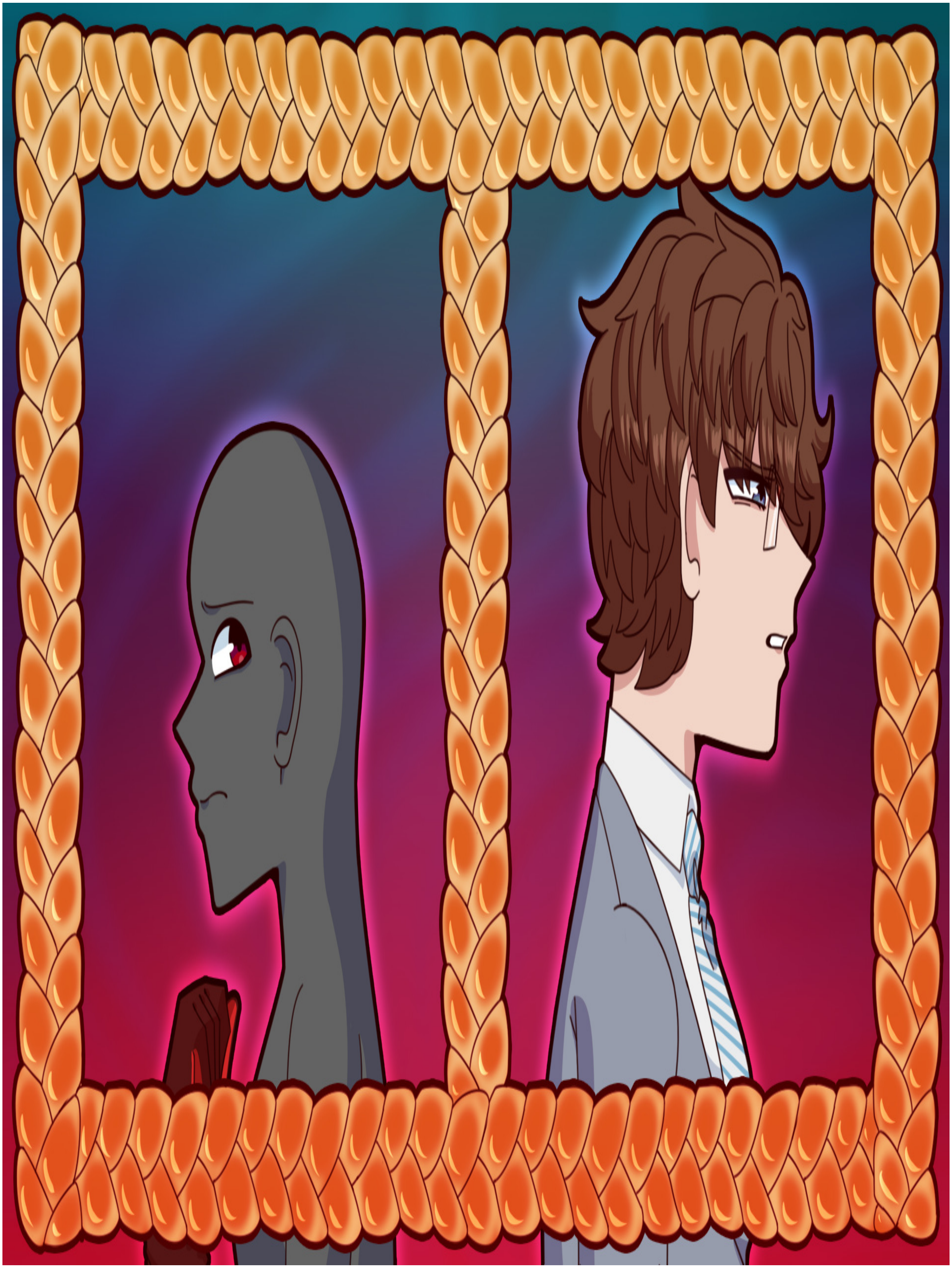
L: “However, due to the previous injury on their thumb, their grip on the knife was not as strong, which allowed Yuri the opportunity to fight back. The struggle had ended with the culprit stabbing the knife right through Yuri’s left hand. Being weaponless, the culprit had decided to run off into the library as a trick to get Yuri to chase them. They had probably noticed the bookshelf with the removed books nearby beforehand, and lured Yuri towards it.”


SLICE
HEAVE

L: “Once the culprit had ran behind the bookshelf, they pushed it down onto Yuri in front. In a state of panic, she must’ve held her hands out to brace herself, but by doing so, caused the impact of the bookshelf to push the knife into her chest, trapping her underneath and killing her. Afterwards, all the culprit could do was return to the first island to retrieve their handcuff and slip it back on as if they had never taken it off to begin with. And, as they always wore gloves, the mould would’ve been able to hide any suspicion off of their hands.”


MUMBLE
NNN
HAH
MUMBLE
Act 6
GH...
HEHEH...
MUMBLE
MUMBLE
EH?

L: “Unfortunately, the case does not end there. Some time around 12:30A.M., Jesse and Bojack had begun to walk back to the hotel from the woodworking shop. However, at that moment, Jesse had picked up on mumbling from the clocktower. This was none other than *Ena* , who hadn’t died at all yet due to the anomaly of their character causing the effect of the fall and the poison to yield slower. Ena must’ve finally succumbed to the poison at some point after this, meaning Natsuki would not have been the first killer, but the *culprit* , something no one would’ve anticipated.”



Hayasaka: ("And that culprit… That culprit I still can't believe would do such a thing… It was you, *Mai Tsurugi* .")

COMPLETE

Mai: “Ah, thank you, L. In a way, I feel rather… glad my crime was explained. And, ah, Natsuki…”

Natsuki: “...”

Mai: “...I’m terribly sorry for keeping quiet and placing you under the majority of the stress of suspicion.”

Latte: “ *Sob*... No…”

Monotora: “Hehehe… I think this is the perfect time to start the votin’ now, eh?”

Kurumada: “No, damnit! You can’t–!”

Mai: “ *Please* vote for me, Kurumada, Hayasaka, even you, Latte. Regardless of how you feel, the only way you’ll be safe is if you vote for me.”

Hayasaka: (“...What do I do…? Haha, *what do I do* …?”)

Monotora: “Now then, go ahead n’ cast your votes for who you think the culprit is! The votin’ should be live right about now – so get crackin’! I wonder who it’ll be? Gahahaha~!”

VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: END!

Monotora: “Alright, the results are in! And you are… correct again! I sure didn’t see that comin’ or nothin’. The one who killed yandere first was so totally Mai! *And* , the one who offed picasso second was indeed Natsuki! Argh–but the vote wasn't unanimous *again* ! Looks like Mai's fanclub – Kurumada, Hayasaka n' Latte – all decided to vote for themselves like a bunch'a braindeads! Man, ya lucky there was enough people to outweigh ya deathwish, kehehe!"

Hayasaka: ("This…This can't be. This has to be… some sort of mistake. Mai… Mai could never…")

As Hayasaka stood there, frozen, he watched as Mai gently put her glove back on and shook her head with a distant smile."

Mai: "...I see. So, none of you voted for me in the end. Haha, no, I should've expected that, shouldn't I? It's not like *I* could have ever voted for one of you if our roles were swapped…"

The three remained quiet, faces rife with disbelief and confusion. Mai sighed.

Mai: "Ah, I'm sorry."

Kurumada: "...Why…? Why the *fuck* did you do it?! Why did you kill Yuri, Mai?!"

Mai: "Kurumada…!"

Kurumada: "Damnit–! I'm sorry, I just… Why?"

Mai: "...If you want to know everything, the whole truth, I'll have to start back at the stage bar."

Brian: "The stage bar… That's when you would've heard Yuri's poem, right?"

Mai: "Not only did Ena pick up on its meaning, but I did as well. Not exactly the perspective swap part, but I did catch on that Yuri was planning to do something that involved Natsuki at the clocktower."

Latte: “But… if you knew what the poem meant, then why didn’t you tell anyone about it…?”

Mai: “I… I suppose I didn’t want to worry anyone. Especially not Hayasaka, who would’ve become anxious, or Kurumada, who would’ve attempted something reckless and got hurt.”

The two called out remained quiet at Mai’s remark.

Mai: “...Knowing I wouldn’t have been able to do anything while confined to the first island with Kurumada as my partner at the time, all I could do was keep an eye out for anything suspicious.”

Jesse: “And that’s when you saw Natsuki return to the hotel.”

Mai: “At first, I was relieved to see her unharmed, but then I realised just how shaken she appeared… and I knew something bad must have happened. Not able to sit still any longer, I took a knife from the kitchen just in case I needed to defend myself, and started to head towards the island’s bridge.”

L: “According to the motive’s rules, your handcuff should’ve begun to beep around then, since Kurumada was on the other side of the island at the hotel.”

Mai: “Yes… And when that happened, the only way I knew I was going to get free was by leaving my handcuff. But, as I was in such a rush under the impression that someone was in trouble, the next best thing in my irrational thinking at the time was to dislocate my thumb and wiggle out of the grasp.”

Bojack: “You really couldn’t think of anything else?”

Mai: “I acknowledge how morbid such a thing is, and it did hinder me from holding the knife correctly, but it was the only way I thought I could escape. Maybe if I had a more clear mind at the time I could’ve come up with something less harmful to myself, but if I had to do it again… I probably would.”

Saiki: “ *And the reason you tied your handcuff to the tree* …”

Mai: “I couldn’t just leave it knowing it would’ve snapped back to Kurumada and killed him. So, to protect him, I hid it there in the park before I rushed off to the clocktower.”

Kurumada: “...”

Mai: “Once I had arrived, I had witnessed Ena supposedly dead on the ground floor… and none other than Yuri walking down the stairs. Obviously, I had assumed Yuri was the one who killed her, and I became upset and frustrated that she had used Natsuki in some way to kill her new friend…”

Natsuki: “...”

Mai: “And so, I followed Yuri back to the library and when her back was turned, I attacked her. Of course, due to my lack of proper grip on the knife, I did struggle a little bit to keep the fight in my favour, so I eventually ended up using all my strength to send the knife through Yuri’s hand.”

Latte: “That’s…”

Mai: “...If I’m being honest, I was only trying to stun Yuri so that I could apprehend her to stop her from potentially attacking anyone else. But since the knife was now with Yuri, I was unsure if she could’ve ripped out the knife and attacked me. So, I began to run away, and I heard Yuri chase after me.”

Brian: “So you ran away not as a trick, but because you were genuinely afraid of what she might’ve done…”

Jesse: “So what made you wanna push the bookshelf on her?”

Mai: “While I was running, I noticed a bookshelf up ahead that lacked quite a considerable amount of books. Weighing my options in the limited time I had, I pushed the bookshelf on top of Yuri as a means to stun her.”

L: “But you would’ve never anticipated the bookshelf to have caused Yuri to stab herself in return.”

Mai: “I… I wasn’t thinking very clearly at the time, I suppose. When I realised there was no response from Yuri – not even breathing – I knew I had killed her. All I could do was flee the scene; it’s not as if I was able to lift up the bookshelf or anything. But, as I thought Yuri had already murdered Ena, I was unsure if I was going to be considered as the true culprit or not.”

Hayasaka: (“So when Mai spoke to me this morning in the kitchen…”)

FLASHBACK

It was Mai, but instead of her usual idle smile, Hayasaka noticed, she appeared almost contemplative.

Hayasaka: “Mai? A-Are you alright?”

Seemingly unfazed, Mai perked up with a smile.

Mai: “Oh, Hayasaka! Sorry if I made you worry: I was just unsure on what to bake today, hehe.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“She was actually worrying about her murder case…”)

Bojack: “What happened when you found out Natsuki was the killer then?”

Mai: “Honestly, as selfish as the thought was, I was… glad. I was glad that I didn’t have to worry about whether or not I’d be regarded as the culprit anymore, as Natsuki was going to be the one to die.”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “Wait a ‘sec. So why the hell did the tiger insist we already had the first killer when they brought up the rule?”

Monotora: “Kehehe… No reason, really. It was just funny seein’ things play out under that guise!”

Saiki: “ *That’s not even a fair play at all. That’s just scummy.* ”

Mai: “...I see. It was simply another trick. Well, once it was found out that the death order was different, I began to panic, but ultimately attempted to keep my cool. I suppose when Hayasaka was the one to call me out from everyone, I became anxious. I was surprised he even had the confidence to do so.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, Mai, I–it wasn’t my intention to…!”

Mai: “It’s okay, Hayasaka. I’m awfully proud of how far you’ve come in these trials. You were never like this before we were taken to this island.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “That–That can’t be the only reason why you did it, though… I don’t believe you would’a went so far to do all that just ‘cuz you believed Yuri killed someone. If anything, you should’ve let Yuri get away with it so we could’ve killed her off in the trial!”

Natsuki slightly grimaced at Kurumada’s words, but remained silent.

Mai: “...I did it for the same reason anyone else here would. Ever since Yuri expressed her motives to get everyone killed for the sake of ending the death game, surely we all wanted to stop her from executing another murder case to do so. When I attacked Yuri, I was doing it to save everyone from another dangerous stunt like she had pulled in the second trial.”

Brian: “That…”

Mai: “I didn’t like it when there was a rift between everyone and Yuri, I didn’t like how Natsuki felt isolated from no one believing in her friend, I didn’t like how everyone was just a little bit more upset in their daily lives together on this island.”

Latte: “Mai…”

Mai: “If anything, I would’ve done anything in my power to stop this… and I did just that. Just to bring the smiles back to everyone like it was before when no one was dead. That’s why after Walter and Hiroshi’s death, I was excited to invite all the girls to karaoke – I just wanted to make everyone happy again.”

Hayasaka: (“Mai’s motivation is rather selfless… Despite the fact that a killer should be a selfish being for taking another life, I can’t… I can’t see Mai in the same light.”)

Natsuki: “...Y-You know, just because your goal was to make everyone happy, you did the complete opposite with me.”

Mai looked towards Natsuki, who had avoided her sight by glancing towards the floor. Clenching a loose fist, Mai bowed her head slightly.

Mai: “Natsuki, I couldn’t even begin to convey how deeply sorry I am for doing what I did to Yuri. I never intended for this to hurt you. If the situation was different, I would have perhaps tried to reason with her, but… I didn’t have much of a choice once I was weaponless and being chased down by her.”

Monotora: “Ha! Ya don’t have much of a leg to stand on yourself, cupcake! Don’t be such a damn hypocrite when you’re just as much of a killer as her!”

Natsuki faltered, her words clearly caught in her throat for any kind of defence. The only sound that escaped her dry mouth were her sobs.

Natsuki: “I-I’m such a horrible idiot for what I did…!”

Mai: “No, Natsuki. What you did was not your fault. You had been manipulated by Yuri into killing Ena. By proxy, Yuri really is the true culprit behind Ena’s case for deriving the whole thing – all she did was have you carry out the most crucial part.”

Natsuki remained silent still. Mai took a step towards her.

Mai: “...Do you remember how upset Ena was seeing you were hesitant to push them off the top of the clocktower? What did you think that meant?”

Natsuki: “...That they felt betrayed.”

Despite Natsuki’s mumbles, Mai shook her head.

Mai: “No, it was quite the contrary. Seeing that you were hesitant to push Ena let them know that they could trust you up until the very last minute. I even believe that them holding out as long as possible actually saved you in the end, perhaps as a sign of your friendship.”

Natsuki didn’t respond, but nodded in understanding.

Monotora: “Kehehe, I gotta admit, it’s a hell of a blessin’ for you though, ain’t it? But for bread lady on the other hand as the technical first killer, she’s gotta suffer the consequence of the execution!”

Hayasaka: (“No… No…!”)

Kurumada: “You ain’t executin’ Mai! You just aint’! This entire trial’s unfair! She didn’t even know she was gonna be the first killer, damnit! Even *you* fuckers screwed up on your end with the case, so this whole thing shouldn’t count at all!”

Monotora: “The part we screwed up on had nothin’ to do with Mai’s case – and the poison thing ain’t our fault to begin with! We ain’t taking liability for your own mistakes!”

Kurumada: “Gh! You *asshole* ! I’m gonna take you down, right here, right now!”

Monotora: “Gahaha! Oh? You’re serious? I s’pose a quick fight beforehand shouldn’t take too long. I’ll defeat you easily, anyway.”

Hayasaka watched helplessly as Kurumada began to square up against Monotora, who had sprung up from their throne seat with a perked up attitude. However, just before either could even think of striking–

Mai: “Stop this, you muscleheads!”

Kurumada: “Wh-wha–? Mai–What’re you doing?! Do you wanna die or something–?!”

Mai: “ *I don’t know* !”

Mai’s shout had stunned Kurumada into silence. Her once cheery, sweet-laced voice had been replaced by utter fear and helplessness. After a moment, Mai composed herself, dropping her eyes to the floor.

Mai: “I… I had a lot going on for me in my life before this. My career, my friends and family… I haven’t even settled down yet with a partner…”

Latte: “...”

Mai: “But–but regardless of that, even if I was given the opportunity to live past this, I know I’ll never be able to carry on as normal knowing I took a life away with my own hands. Even if it was someone like Yuri… Committing murder – it changes you. I was surprised how the two boys before managed to cope.”

Hayasaka: ("I… I don't understand how Mai feels. I don't think I'll *ever* understand how she's feeling right now, but…") "I-I believe you, Mai…"

Kurumada: "Gh, it sounds to me like you're just giving up…"

Mai: "Well I'd rather do that than cause any more harm by allowing any of you to do something irrational and get hurt! I knew the consequence of risking it all to follow Yuri, and yet I took the chance regardless! I'm going to die, and there's nothing you can do to stop that! So… So all you can do is listen to me now while I still have time."

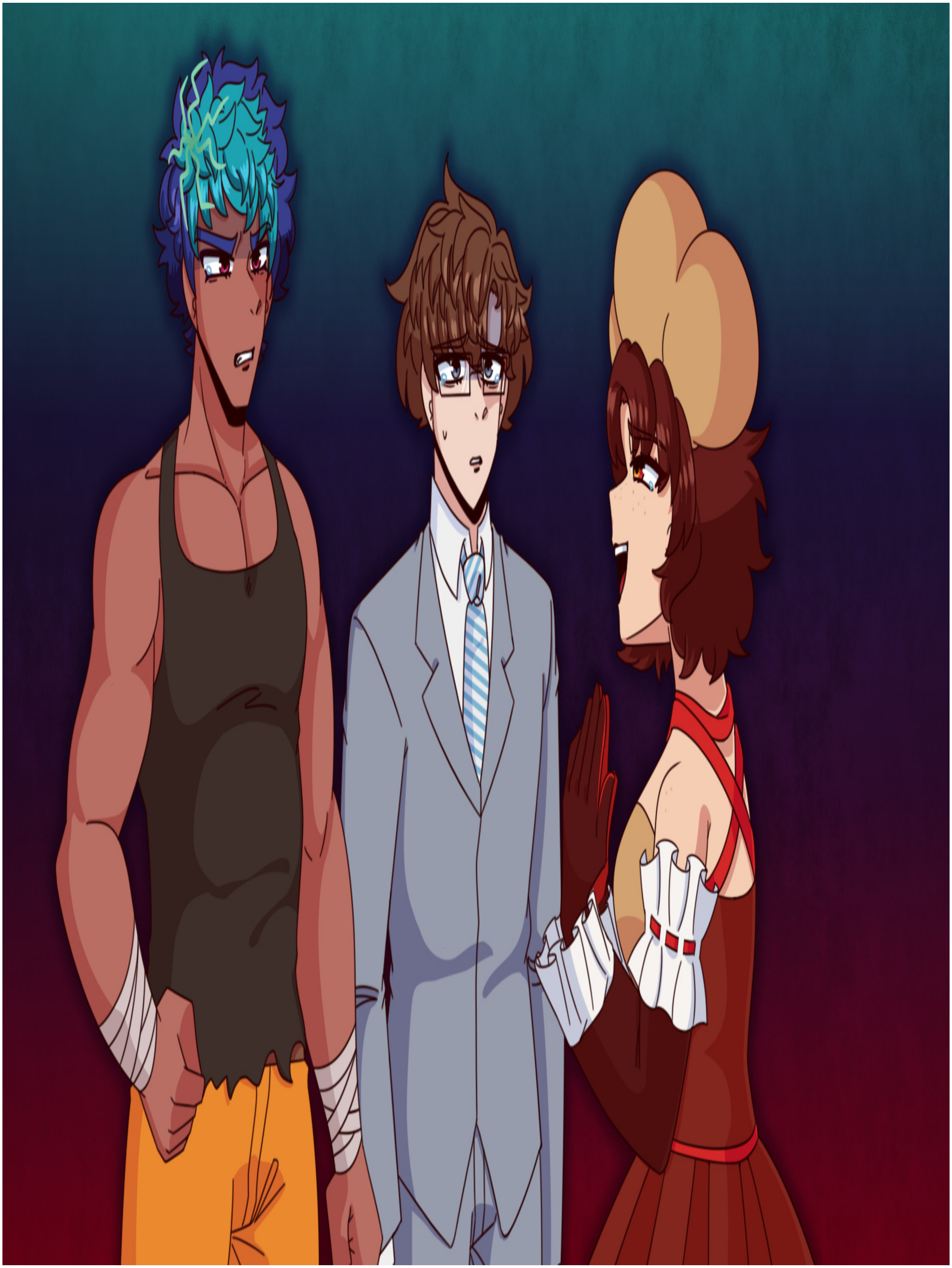
As Mai spoke, her voice began to waver with each word, holding back her emotions as best she could at the start, but letting it all eventually spill out at the end. Kurumada ceased to argue any more, instead silently stepping back over to Hayasaka who had begun to feel himself tremble at the insanity of it all.

Slowly, Mai began to step towards Latte, removing the hand that cupped her gaping mouth as she took it into her own.

Mai: “Latte… My goodness, you’ve been a lovely friend–no, I can’t hide it anymore, can I? *Girlfriend* , isn’t it? Haha… If it were a different situation, I probably would’ve made a move quicker. Despite that, you’re a lovely and beautiful lady, and you will surely meet someone just like me in the future. Stay strong for me, won’t you?”

Mai then leaned up to plant a soft kiss on Latte’s cheek. Choking back her sobs, Latte tried a smile that was quickly overwhelmed with sorrow.

Finally, Mai moved towards Kurumada and Hayasaka. She looked up at them with a small smile.



Mai: “You two… Ah, where do I even begin? Hayasaka, Kurumada… You two have been some of the most interesting people I’ve ever had the pleasure of befriending. Even though the three of us are almost completely different people, I believe we’ve managed to find comfort in each other for such a long time despite our small fights here and there. I only ask that your progress on escaping the island is not hindered by losing yourselves to the grief after I’m gone. I want you both to be strong, and to rely on each other and the friends that you’ve made here to help you. I… wouldn’t forgive you from the afterlife otherwise, haha…”

Hayasaka couldn’t reply; he felt as if his vocal chords had been locked up, unable to produce any words. For Mai to even have to say these things had left him lost on what to do. But it was the same for Kurumada as well – not even he could say anything back. Mai’s smile only grew wider, taking both their hands and enveloping them in one another’s as her voice was confined to a low tone.

Mai: “...The least I can do is give you two a push for the future.”

Taking a few steps back to put some space between them, Mai looked towards Monotora.

Mai: “...You can start the execution now. I don’t want to prolong the inevitable any longer.”

Monotora: “ *Finally* ! I swear, these damn ‘final moments’ are gettin’ longer n’ longer!”

Hayasaka felt himself squeeze Kurumada’s hand out of sheer panic, his breathing turning shaky.

Monotora: “So then, we’ve prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Baker, Mai!”

Hayasaka: “I-Is this… really happening…? Mai, p-please…”

Kurumada: “Damnit… Damnit…!”

Latte: “Mai…!!”

But all Mai did was smile.

Monotora: “Time to play with my prey! IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!!”

Mai: “Keep looking forward. Keep living, *for me* .”

PUNISHMENT TIME [VIDEO]

…

Nothing. No words. Not a single person wanted to speak. The air was dense, hot, and *brutal* . The only sound that could be heard was Latte, who had broken out into full sobs.

Monotora: “Mm-mm! Care for a ginger-Mai, anyone?”

Natsuki: “Shut the *fuck* up…!”

Monotora scowled, tossing the tray aside.

Kurumada: “... *Fuck* …Fuck!! If only we reacted sooner–tried harder–then Mai wouldn’t have suffered from that goddamn–!”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada…!”

Hayasaka felt his voice waver as he choked back a sob over the words he forced out. Kurumada turned to him, chuckling in disbelief under his breath.

Kurumada: “Did Mai really just *die* in front of us…? Can I even believe my own damn eyes…?”

Hayasaka’s mouth lingered ajar for a moment, before he caved into the silence.

Monotora: “Ya better believe it! Mai is dead – and there’s nothin’ you could’a done about it! Kehehe, but what if you could have? You hardly tried enough. Did you really even like her considering all that you did?”

Brian: “Hey! Leave them alone! You don’t have any right to torment them!”

Monotora: “Who said you could talk? How about you shut up, before I do it myself?”

Saiki: “ *Just get lost* .”

Monotora: “Yeesh, now it’s no fun when more of you join in. I don’t wanna stick around to catch the depressing air no more, anyhow. But that doesn’t mean the rest of you can loiter around! Ya better scatter from here as soon as possible – Nesos has a lotta work cut out for ‘em with cleanin’ up all the killings this time around! Until we meet again, gahaha!”

Slobbering up one of the gingerbreads with a chomp, Monotora took their leave.

Jesse: “...That was just… messed up, man…”

L: “Hm… Even with Yuri gone, it’s intriguing how her point still stands: Mai had to suffer an execution, which caused despair among her friends…”

Bojack: “Did you really have to say that right now? I think we should all just leave.”

Natsuki: “...Latte, do you want me to walk you to your hotel room?”

Latte had gingered up, peering down at Natsuki who had shuffled towards her.

Latte: “N-Natsuki, *sniff* , how considerate of you to offer such a thing… despite you losing people you loved as well…”

Natsuki: “...”

Brian: “...Hayasaka, a-are you going to come with us as well?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Just give us a minute. We’ll catch up later.”

Brian remained still for a moment, before nodding. He and Saiki took one last look at Hayasaka, and then made their way towards the elevator with the rest of the group. The doors closed, and they were gone.

Now alone, Hayasaka had only realised how unresponsive he had been this entire time as he continued to stare blankly at the elevator. Even when he heard it start to ascend, the world was blurring in and out from his view.

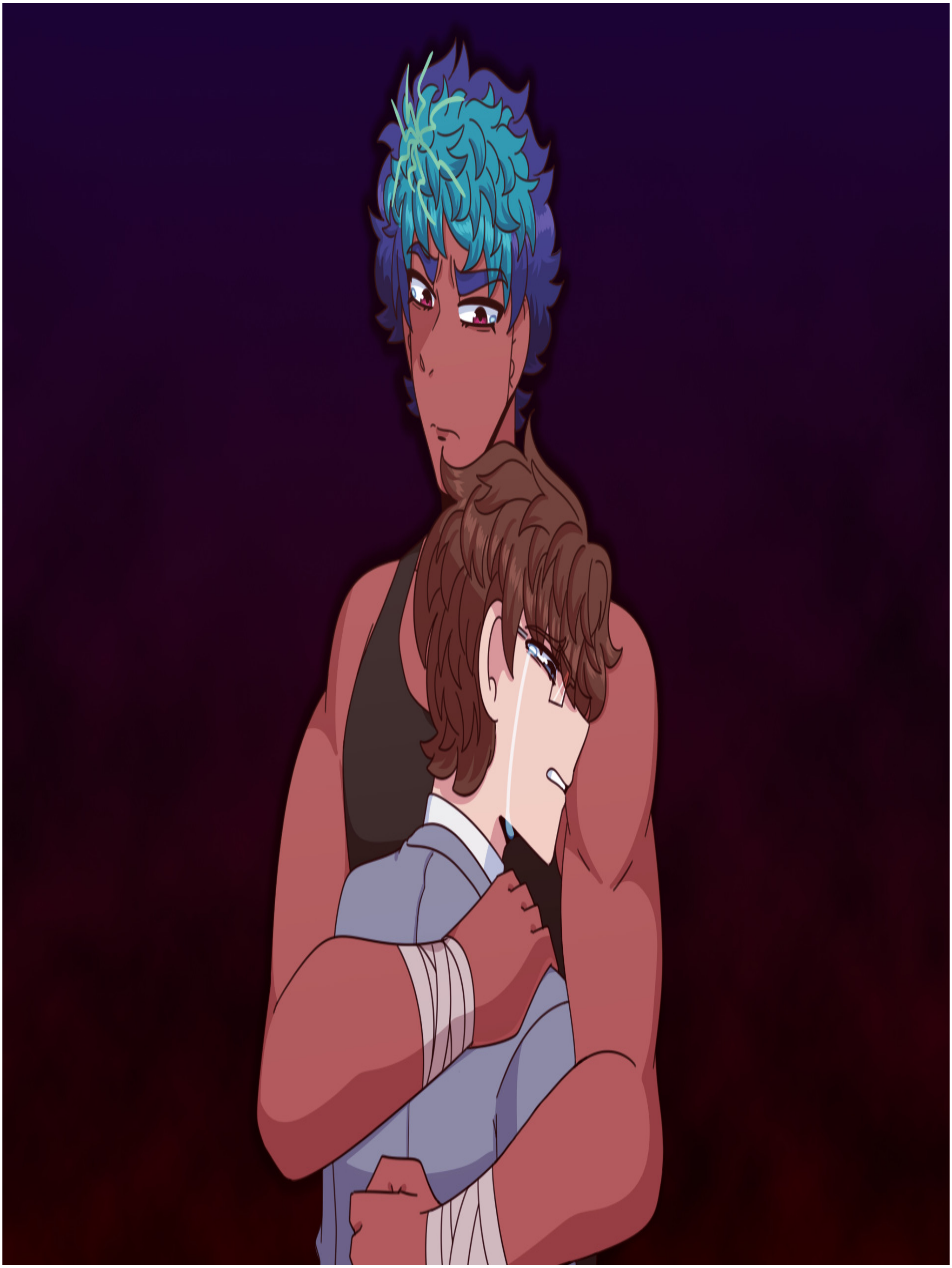
Kurumada: “Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka hadn’t paid attention when Kurumada had slowly approached him, but once he heard his voice call out his name, the tears had begun to spill. At first, he tried his hardest to conceal them, but there was no use now. The silence was suffering.

And then he was sobbing. Hunching into himself. Hand cupping around his mouth in an attempt to muffle his weeping. The salty tears streaming down his cheeks.

Kurumada: “Hey, hey…! Shh, c’mere…”

Responding quickly, Kurumada took Hayasaka into his arms in an attempt to console him. Although his arms were tightly wrapped around his back, Hayasaka’s body had continued to stay stiff and rigid.



Kurumada held his voice barely above a whisper as he peppered words of comfort towards the other. What he spoke wasn't anything profound or deep, and yet they were the only words Hayasaka wanted to hear. Although he couldn't see his face, he had heard Kurumada begin to cry as well, trying to hide his own broken state.

Kurumada: "I ain't… I ain't gonna let another murder happen ever again. Not on my watch. If Mai taught us anything with her selfless act, I ain't gonna sit around and let this torment happen anymore."

A quiet moment passed.

Hayasaka: "...That makes two of us."

Looking up at Kurumada hesitantly, Hayasaka matched his face the best he could.

Hayasaka: "I-I'm not going to let Mai die in vain…"

But Hayasaka knew his promise was shaky.

Deep down, he was unsure how to do so.

***

Monotora: “...Oh? What’s that now?”

…

Monotora: “You’re not the only one who ‘can’t handle it’, y’know? Do ya really think you have any authority here?”

…

Monotora: “Do I have to remind you that we made a deal here? If you don’t–”

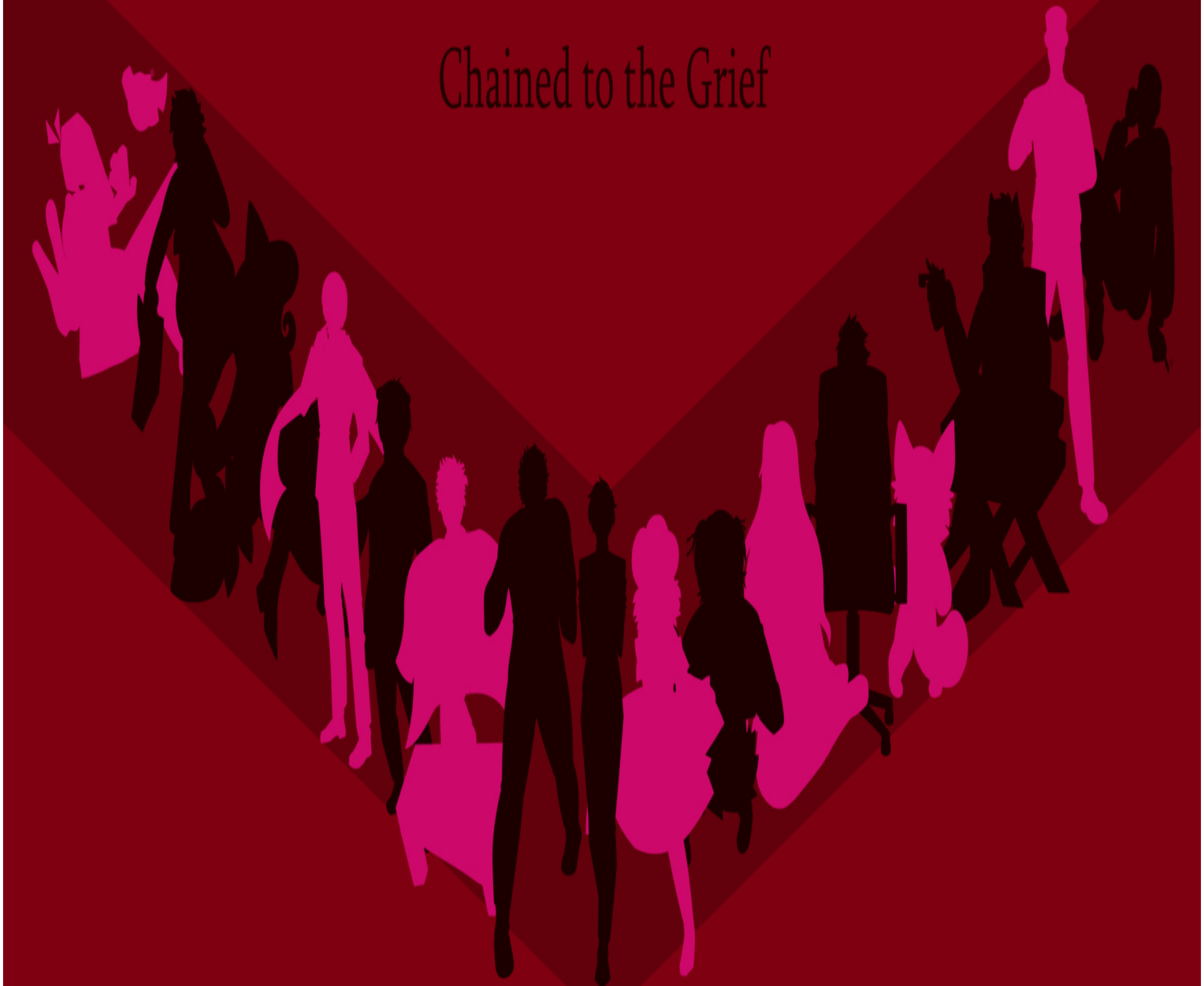
…

Monotora: “Oh… I see how it is. *You’ll regret those words* .”

…

CHAPTER 3

Chained to the Grief



09

Chapter End Notes

GOT DAMN!!!
So, uhm, *ahem*... haha I won 1/2 on this one with the predictions
Also yees there are 2 killers time time around, omg DR could never
(wow and u all thought Natsuki was suffering enough with the 2 dead friends huh..... hoo fuckin boy)
Rexx is not very happy with this one at all.... they love Mai a lot so this one was a big toughy on 'em (I'm so sorry Rexx this is what you have to suffer when you work on a killing game-)
Also if anyone's wondering what Natsuki's AA outfit is a reference to... it's a from a particular vocaloid song (wink wink)
Also also, just to clarify, (???) is speaking in that final convo w Monotora but we just don't know what they be saying
We can only wonder where things will go from here...

And speakin' of... Hey it's that time again, ain't it? What time? Time for the FTE voting for Chapter 4! This time around, the top 5 characters will have their Free Time Event shown in Chapter 4 Daily! So like... R.I.P whoever the bottom 3 are this time around lol (also uh.... cough cough only one particular dude hasn't been shown yet so.... well I just be saying lmao)

LINK TO POLL:
[CLOSED - sorry!]

As always, tyvm for reading!

[EDIT 13.11.22] I'm just putting this here finally for anyone who's wondering when the next chapter will come out: I apologise it's already been a little over 2 months but we've been experiencing a mixture of personal and motivation related issues regarding this fic. So we're just having a bit of a hiatus/break for now. Burn out is a lil bitch for sure lol. Anyway there is no guarantee when we'll pick back up, but that doesn't mean we're abandoning this fic, it's just for a small rest. Thanks for understanding ❤️

[EDIT 27.04.23] Hello again! I apologise for the long break we took on this fic. But as of recent, a lot of progress has been made on chapter 4! However, it's still got some time to go, so in order to provide regular updates I've created a tumblr blog! Think of it as the somewhat official DR96 blog: progress updates, doodles/art, my own thoughts on stuff, and even an opportunity to ask questions and submit things! (It will discuss spoilers for content up to the current chapter, just a heads up)
LINK: www.tumblr.com/danganronpa96

Chapter 4: One's Reality is Another's Delusion (Daily Life)

Chapter Notes

> *walks up onto the stage* hi gu- *realises everyone has left and it has been a year* oh. well hang on. wait a minute now-
>
> but it's nice to be back again, no matter if i freeze myself in ice for a decade longer or whatever
>
> It has been a tough time honestly. I won't lie, there was a moment where I almost dropped this altogether. But I got the sudden burst to go "actually no" back in February and me and Rexx went goblin mode working through the daily/investigation/trial all in one go. Yes we are fine. Yes I swear
>
> I'm sure we've all changed a little within this year, but unfortunately for our island baby girls they have been stuck in time-stop hell (but hey it's summer again technically so it's seasonally accurate)
>
> We definitely had fun working on this chapter though, the... *checks notes* 25k word chapter. Grab a drink and a snack and sit down and maybe grab some tissues if you feelin you gotta hide the pain. Also, there will be a mixture of old (around September 2022) and newer (February 2023) art but hey that's what happens when you go on hiatus. So, again, thanks to everyone who understood and supported us when we were gone, and when we spent all that time working on the chapter. I cannot thank you enough for all the patience and kind words ❤️❤️
>
> So then, see you on the flipside! ^^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

???: “Hm…”

…

???: “...This catalogue is quite hefty…”

???: “Hey, Mai.”

Mai: “Ah, Latte! What is it, dear?”

Latte: “What’re you doing?”

Mai: “Oh, I’m just looking through the song catalogue. I want to see if there’s a song we could all sing together.”

Latte: “Oh! That’s a great idea, actually! I’d love to sing altogether.”

Ena: “But how about Miss Retsuko? Is her voice too shallow for her involvement in our sing-song?”

Latte: “Don’t worry – she’s probably just running a bit late because of her drinking trip last night. I’m sure she’ll show up soon.”

Natsuki: “Hmph. I don’t wanna sing until everyone’s here, anyway.”

Mai: “Or are you just saying that so you can get out of singing for longer, Natsuki? Hehe.”

Natsuki: “N-No! That–that wasn’t what I meant…”

Mai: “Oh? Then if that’s the case, then surely you don’t mind going first, hm?”

Natsuki: “T-That is…! Nn…!”

Yuri: “If Natsuki doesn’t want to sing, you shouldn’t force her to.”

Mai: “...”

Yuri: "..."

Mai: "Haha! I was just teasing her, Yuri."

Yuri: "O-Oh. *Oh* . Um, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to sound so stern just then!"

Latte: "Hehe, you sounded very confident when you did, though. I love to see students grow their sense of authority."

Ena: "Yes, yes! Let the voices in your head be free from one's mouth!"

Yuri: "Mm… T-Thank you. Erm, and Natsuki, I-I don't mind singing with you, if it'd help you be more comfortable…"

Natsuki: "Oh… I guess I don't mind that."

Mai: "Right then, how about we start to sort out the order of the first few songs while we wait for Retsuko?"

Moony: "Hey, lemme go first – I gotta kick it off with my natural born talent."

Ena: "But if you go first, Moony, there will be no crumbs left for us to pick up!"

Moony: "Exactly, heheh."

Natsuki: "... *D-Damnit* –!"

Yuri: "What's wrong, Natsuki…?"

Natsuki: “Nothing, it’s just… I sorta decided to drink a bunch of coffee this morning so I could keep myself awake, but… I guess I drank a bit too much, and now I need the bathroom.”

Latte: “Aw, don’t worry about it! I could walk you there if you’d like.”

Yuri: “A-Actually, I can take her! I know where it is – it’s not too far from this booth.”

Natsuki: “Heh, thanks Yuri.”

Mai: “Don’t be too long now! I want to get the most out of today.”

…

Mai: “ *I want today to be a good day for us all* .”

***

Hayasaka stared ahead at nothing. His body felt tired. Useless. Numb. His taut hand crumpled up yet another fistful of bedsheet, only to uncurl into a lax state. There he laid, sprawled on his bed: glasses somewhere on his bedside table, creased sheets, eyes wet and red. At this point the tears stopped spilling, but his eyes remained glossy and fogged over.

It was the lowest he had ever been for a long time.

Rolling over onto his back, Hayasaka’s eyes slowly shifted to the ceiling. He recalled the events from the previous night once again. After he was walked back to his hotel room by Kurumada (who was mostly guiding his unresponsive legs back if anything), all he was able to do was lie on his bed and cry. The waterworks hadn’t stopped. God forbid if they had ever stopped that night.

Questions kept tormenting him. Did he do all that he could to save Mai? Did he really do anything to save her? Kurumada and Latte had at least tried to pry that oven door open: banging so hard he was sure their fists had become red hot, and yet they both persevered on. All he did was stand there. Was that really what a true friend would've done? Did he really even deserve to cry when he didn't do anything at all but let her burn to death?

Hayasaka: "H-Haa…"

A croaked chuckle escaped his hoarse throat. He didn't even find anything funny.

Hayasaka: ("Mai wanted us to keep going for her sake, was it? Yeah, of course not. Just look at me. I'm sorry, Mai. I can't… I can't do it…")

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Hayasaka barely moved a muscle in response to the knocking. But somehow, he found himself climbing out of bed and shuffling towards the door. He paid no mind to how his matted bangs clung to his forehead, or how his untucked shirt allowed a soft breeze to tickle his abdomen once he unlocked the door.

Kurumada: "Hayasaka…? Jesus…"

Of course it was Kurumada. And now that Hayasaka craned his head up to face him, he was met with wide, concerned eyes. Carefully, he sucked in a breath.

Hayasaka: "I'm–I'm sorry you have to see me like this. I just don't have the energy to help myself right now… You don't look so well either."

His afterthought slipped out by accident, but he wasn't wrong. Kurumada's eyes were dark – no doubt he had definitely shed some tears too in the isolation of his own room. And as Hayasaka focused as much as he could through his blurred vision, he noticed his hair was slightly wet as well, most likely from a recent shower to attempt to hide his sorrowful state. The other flicked his eyes aside for a moment, faltering for an excuse.

Kurumada: "I just… I just don't wanna sit in my room all day n' sulk, y'know? I'd rather motivate myself to just… do something. Find some way to escape, like before."

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Shit, I didn’t mean to–I didn’t mean to imply you…”

Hayasaka: “...It’s alright. I really couldn’t take any offence when you’re exactly right.”

Kurumada: “...No.”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Kurumada then walked past Hayasaka into his hotel room, scanning around. Hayasaka took a step inside after him, trying to figure out his intentions.

Kurumada: “You should at least get yourself looking decent to go down to the restaurant. It’s a given everyone else is gonna be meetin’ up there soon.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, I can’t…”

Hayasaka hesitated on his words, shuffling on the spot. He watched as Kurumada’s eyes lit up as he found what he was looking for. Retrieving his glasses from his bedside table, he stepped back over to him. Gently, he slid his glasses onto his face, Hayasaka refraining from any struggle.

Kurumada: “Don’t ya think Brian and Saiki are gonna be worried about you?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Look, ya don’t have to do anything crazy to prove yourself. Just takin’ little steps will help ya get stronger. And you can start by comin’ down to the restaurant to let everyone know you’re alright.”

Hayasaka’s eyes trailed around the much clearer view of the carpet below, before glancing up at Kurumada and forcing an appreciative smile.

Hayasaka: “T-Thank you, Kurumada. I’ll… meet you down there in a few minutes.”

Kurumada hummed in approval, patting Hayasaka’s shoulder as he left his room. Hayasaka felt his clammy forehead, and sighed.

After fumbling around to gather his appearance into something more presentable, Hayasaka finally walked into the restaurant to see everyone else had already arrived. The awkward feeling of being the last one there fizzled in his gut, but he brushed it aside as he did a double take. Everyone else was here? Even Latte? Even *Natsuki* ? Despite everything that happened, she was present too.

A murderer who got away with her crime. A murderer he didn’t even want to call a murderer.

Brian: “Hayasaka…!”

Hayasaka snapped back into reality as he saw Brian approach him with relief washed over his timid face.

Brian: “How’re you doing? W-Well, um, okay that’s not a really good question to ask now, is it? Ah, I’m sorry, I’ve just been really worried for you ever since yesterday…”

Hayasaka gave Brian a soft look before nodding.

Hayasaka: “To say that I’m fine would be a lie. Ah, b-but, I’m going to try and push on slowly for Mai…”

Hayasaka saw in the corner of his vision Kurumada shoot him a nod. Latte then stepped forward, holding her hand to her chest.

Latte: “I… I plan to do the same. I’ve surely cried all the tears I could last night. Even if I feel like it’s going to be hard, all I want to do now is carry on Mai’s wish…”

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “...Ah, Natsuki. You’re so brave for showing up this morning, too.”

Jesse: “Actually, uh, I was the one to convince her to come down.”

Natsuki: “...I-I’m just here to get breakfast. Nothing more.”

Natsuki curtly looked away, a sign she wished to drop the subject completely.

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki deserves all the time she needs to grieve. She’s younger than me after all…”)

Monotora: “Oh? Ya sure? ‘Cuz ya sure as hell don’t wanna miss out on what’s happenin’ next, do ya?”

Monotora snickered as they pounced through the open restaurant doors.

Bojack: “Well if it isn’t the asshole of the hour. What the hell do you want now?”

Monotora: “Kehehe, it should be obvious by now, eh? It’s the dawn after a trial~...”

L: “I suppose the next island has been opened for us to explore.”

Monotora: “Ding-ding-ding! Right on the money, bozo! And in my opinion, this one’s a lot more fun than that run-down garbage town! That one was more like filler if anythin’.”

Saiki: “ *We don’t care. Can you leave now* ?”

Monotora then whipped their head around at the group and produced a fake-gag.

Monotora: “Bleh! Fine! No way am I stickin’ around any longer with *this* depressin’ atmosphere! Get lost now, will ya?”

Sticking their tongue out once more, Monotora turned to leave.

L: “...Well then, I won’t force all of you to investigate the new island if you so wish, as I’m sure the previous trial has placed an understandable set back on your mindsets. However, I advise that you’ll all need to eventually take a look for yourselves.”

Jesse: “Hey, Natsuki, why don’t you tag along? There might be somethin’ fun to get your mind ‘offa things.”

Natsuki: “Um…”

Bojack: “There also might be something completely boring instead.”

Jesse: “Bojack! You ain’t helping, asshole.”

Bojack: “Natsuki’s friends are dead. The last thing she should realistically want to be doing is having ‘fun’.”

Jesse: “What the hell is wrong with you?! What gives you the right to say somethin’ like that to her? It’s not like *you* understand how it feels to lose someone you knew from back home.”

Latte: “Hey, stop fighting! It’s hardly the thing we need right now to keep the group’s spirits up.”

Both Jesse and Bojack paused their bickering, sheepishly looking over at Natsuki who had clenched her fists in embarrassment.

Jesse: “Damnit… I’m sorry, Natsuki.”

Bojack: “No, *I* should be the one apologising. I shouldn’t have said that.”

Natsuki: “...It’s fine.”

As Hayasaka watched the short-lived conflict die out, he noticed Brian turn to him.

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka, are you planning to come and check out the new island?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, that is… I don’t know. I’m unsure if I…”

Kurumada: “...Hey, what would Mai say to that, if she was here?”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? Um, I suppose she… ah, she probably would’ve dragged us there by now, right? Haha…”

Kurumada: “Then we’ll do just that, eh? Heheh.”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada…”) “Alright…”

Natsuki: “I-I’m going too…!”

Jesse: “So you do wanna come after all, huh?”

Natsuki: “J-Just to accompany Latte, okay? Otherwise she’ll just be around a bunch of guys…”

Latte: “Aw, Natsuki, how sweet of you…! Us ladies should stick together!”

Saiki: “ *At least her excuse was taken well* .”

L: “...Hm. This is a rather interesting turn of events. In that case, we should all get going.”

Following L’s word, the group began to navigate toward the second island’s south-east bridge and on to the fourth island. The walk to the new island was calm – too calm – as usually Hayasaka would overhear the light chatter of Mai gushing to Latte about her predictions on the new island, or Ena chanting strange yet endearing things to themselves as they usually did. Only now, this moment felt empty. Perhaps in an alternative world, Hayasaka would’ve attempted to strike up conversation himself. Yet, he kept his lips sealed, letting the lapping of the ocean waves stride past his ears instead.

Arriving onto the new island, everyone split up onto different paths for their usual investigations. Hayasaka opted to stay beside the bridge, until he felt a hand plant itself on his tense shoulder.

Kurumada: “Hey, I’m stickin’ strictly with you this time around, y’hear me?”

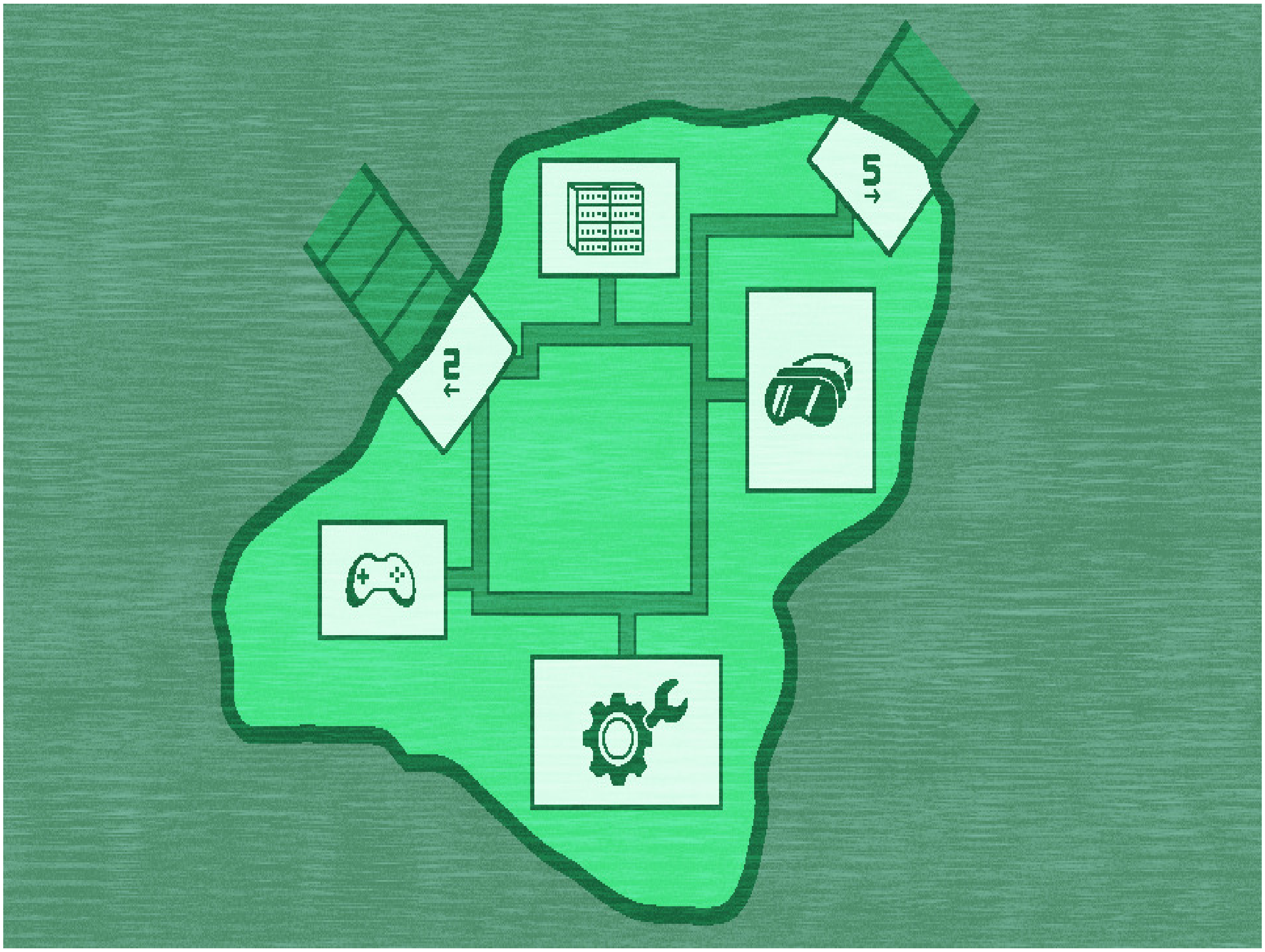
Hayasaka: “Kurumada… You’ve always been with me during the island investigations, anyhow.”

Kurumada: “... *Oh yeah* . Well–I meant it differently this time! I’m gonna be watchin’ out for ya more closely, alright? And if the slightest thing ticks you off, then we’re headin’ back, no questions asked.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you really don’t have to do that for me…”

Kurumada: “I ain’t taking no for an answer.”

Kurumada flashed an assured smile and patted Hayasaka’s shoulder. Hayasaka sighed, hiding the smile that teased his lips as he went to retrieve his tablet and pulled up the new map.



Hayasaka: (“This is… a refreshing island, to say the least. Not in a relieved way, but… I just feel more familiar with high-tech facilities such as this… A factory, a database… Ah, there’s quite a lot of interesting things here…”)

Kurumada: “...This place looks way more modern than the last one. Let’s just hope there’s better clues around here, eh?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose there’s only one way to find out… Where should we look first?”

Kurumada: “If we start walkin’ down, we’ll hit the arcade first. Might as well see what’s goin’ on over there.”

On that note, the two travelled to the arcade down south of the path. The interior was darkened, illuminated only by the neon lights flashing on the many attractions and games it housed. Cranes, slot machines, kart games, air hockey, quiz machines, dance mats and so much more were scattered about, almost enough to overwhelm Hayasaka with the buzz of it all.

Hayasaka: (“How vibrant… It reminds me of the types of arcades I’d see back at home, haha…”)

As the two searched around, they stumbled across a certain ‘shoot-em-up’ game currently occupied by none other than Jesse and Bojack. The way Jesse was aiming the plastic gun at the large screen as if he were holding a real firearm was endearing in an odd way, Hayasaka thought.

Jesse: “Yeah, bitch, taste my lead!”

Bojack: “How do you even–god, it’s not even shooting the guy!”

Jesse: “Uh, maybe it’s ‘cuz you ain’t clicking the trigger all the way?”

Bojack: “Cleary I am, Todd 2. This game’s just old.”

Enticed by the strange scenario, Hayasaka watched the two play until Bojack’s character died. Bojack then promptly shoved the gun a little too forcefully back into the holder and crossed his arms.

Bojack: “Great waste of my time. That wasn’t even my fault, though – you didn’t even teach me how to play properly, Todd 2.”

Jesse: “Haha, you’re such a sore loser.”

Jesse chuckled as he finished off the level, blowing the gun's tip as if it really had produced smoke before chucking it back into the holder.

Kurumada: "I guess this island ain't so borin' now, is it?"

Bojack: "Screw off. Todd 2's the one who dragged me into playing this crappy game, anyway."

Jesse: "Yeah, 'cuz this place's the fuckin' bomb, yo. Check out these games, man. I haven't seen some of these titles in a while."

Hayasaka: "Ah, it's certainly suited for an energetic crowd. I couldn't really see myself going here too often, haha…"

Kurumada: "Y'know, I sometimes used to go to arcades with Anzu. She'd beat my ass in those kart games, but I sure as hell never lost a round of Street Fighter."

Jesse: "Heh, you should totally one-v-one me in that case."

Kurumada: "Naw, real men battle it out on the ring."

Jesse: "What?"

Hayasaka: ("You do realise there isn't actually a boxing ring anywhere, right Kurumada? Ah, but… I'm glad to see Jesse and Bojack have made up rather quickly from their previous squabble in the restaurant earlier…")

Jesse: "Oh, uh, hey, that reminds me. If you ever see Natsuki around, tell her I found some manga at the prize counter. I think she mentioned before how she's into that stuff."

Hayasaka: "Ah, really? Then, we'll make sure to let her know."

Seeing as there was not much left to note, the pairs parted ways as Jesse dragged Bojack elsewhere in the arcade. Following the path down to the next building, Hayasaka and Kurumada came across a factory. Scattered about were many mechanical parts and machinery Hayasaka could only assume were for engineering purposes. It appeared to host different facilities, such as a room separated only by glass as if for safe testing on the other side, and even a small break room down the hall.

Also present were Latte and Natsuki, attempting to search around the vast amount of machinery.

Kurumada: "Oi, havin' any luck here?"

Natsuki: "H-Huh? Jeeze, you didn't have to sneak up on us. But, um, I guess I found this weird manual… Apparently some sort of 'robot-prototype' was made here."

Hayasaka: "Robot-prototype…? Ah, you don't suppose this is where Monotora was created?"

Kurumada: "Shit, you're 'prolly right. With all these spare parts lyin' around, I sure hope they ain't plannin' to make another."

Natsuki: "I mean, Kaidou did suggest before about making a communication device, and with these parts it could be possible. I-It's not like I'd know how to start things, though…"

Latte: "To be honest, I've never really been too informed with technology myself. While some cookies are very talented in said field, I've more or less stuck to the magic side of things. Although, it was very sweet of you to remember Kaidou's idea after all this time, Natsuki…"

Natsuki: "Um, I dunno, I was just thinking aloud…"

Kurumada: "Anythin' else you find in here?"

Latte: "Actually, I did stumble across this small collar while I was looking around."

Latte held up a rose-red collar, its bell jingling.

Natsuki: “...Huh. It kinda smells like cotton candy.”

Kurumada: “What the hell’s that doin’ here? Did someone lose a cat or somethin’?”

Hayasaka: “As it looks too small to belong to Monotora, I’m not quite sure who it’s meant for.”

Latte: “Ah well, I suppose we’ll just keep searching around, right Natsuki?”

Hayasaka: (“Speaking of her…”) “Ah, Natsuki, that reminds me. Jesse wanted me to tell you that he found some manga in the arcade.”

Natsuki perked up for a moment, but glanced down as she shrugged.

Natsuki: “...Oh. I guess I might take a look later, or whatever…”

Kurumada: “Heh, I s’pose we should keep an eye on this place just incase Nesos decide to start tryn’a use it again. I’ll catch those bastards in the act if they do.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s certainly one way of scaring them off…”)

Latte: “Oh, by the way, have any of you two seen Moony yet?”

Hayasaka: “Moony? I’m sorry, I can’t say that I have…”

Kurumada: “I swear the last time I saw her was during the stand-up event with Ena.”

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “Oh, I see. Well, I just want to keep an eye out for her, hm? I’d hate for something bad to have happened…”

Kurumada: “She’s damn small, though. Could take a while to find her, wherever she is.”

Natsuki: “Y-Yeah, so let’s just focus on this okay?”

Latte: “Oh, I suppose you’re right…”

Hayasaka: (“I can see Natsuki doesn’t want to discuss anything related to Ena right now. Whether she turns up eventually or not, it’s not my place to say…”)

Hayasaka and Kurumada stayed back to look around a little while longer, before parting ways with the others. Needless to say, the next building they came across had them both in a stump, appearing awfully vague aesthetic-wise on the outside, and just as strange inside as well. As Hayasaka scanned around, he found the open space occupied with an abundance of monitors and other high-tech equipment. But what stood out the most with a simple circle of cushioned chairs in the middle, each provided with a headset beside them.

By these chairs were Brian and Saiki, the former of the two shooting a smile at them as he noticed their arrival.

Brian: “Oh, hey guys. How’re you doing?”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Brian. We’re, ah, fine. So, what’ve you found here so far?”

Brian: “Um, gosh, a lot of stuff, really. I’m just kinda taken aback by all the technology, I guess? I would've never thought to see monitors so thin before…”

Kurumada: “Are you sure you’re livin’ in our time period? Who hasn’t seen flat screens before?”

Brian: “According to what I’ve seen, this is apparently a ‘VR facility’, whatever that is.”

Hayasaka: “Have you never heard of virtual reality before, Brian?”

Brian: “Erm, not really, no.”

Saiki: “ *Even I know at least a few classmates who own their own VR headsets at home already.* ”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well, it’s like a simulated experience through computer generated environments. It’s mostly known for video games, really, haha.”

Brian: “Oh… Uh-huh. Ha, I guess I’ll just have to get used to such a futuristic concept.”

Kurumada: “VR really ain’t that new anymore, y’know? Seriously, why’re ya so damn weird with technology?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…! Please stop making comments about him.”

Kurumada: “I ain’t!”

Brian: “H-Hey, um, it’s okay…! If anything, Saiki’s doing a way better job at investigating this place than I am.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Saiki: “*... I’ve just been checking out the headsets. I haven’t tried any yet* .”

Brian: “Oh yeah. There’s 16 of those headsets, but only 10 chairs around.”

Hayasaka: ("I wonder why Nesos would need to make something like this…?")

Brian: "Mm, should we check them out then?"

Kurumada: "I dunno 'bout that. I'd rather not go messin' around with somethin' made by Nesos like a damn idiot."

Brian: "Oh, y-yeah, I guess so… Um, but it feels like something we should let L know about, right? Maybe he'll have an idea on what to do here."

Hayasaka: "Perhaps you're right on that."

Following a quick run down of anything else that caught his eye, Hayasaka eventually left with Kurumada to the last building on the island. It was the database he had identified earlier on the map, however it turned out to be more overwhelming than he anticipated. Servers and cabinets ran down long strips of aisles with wires cluttered around, winding and twisting their way across the floor. He and Kurumada were forced to watch their step because of this, making sure they weren't victim to tripping over a slyly placed chord. Near the back of the database were a row of desks and monitors, where they found L typing ever-so diligently on a keyboard.

Hayasaka: ("I suppose he's not wasting any time on his investigation, haha…") "Ah, L, have you found anything here so far?"

L: "Oh, we have most definitely hit the jackpot."

Kurumada: "Y'know, for how happy ya sound, ya sure don't show it."

L: "I've only done a mere bit of surface digging around, however there seems to be a lot on the financial transactions and other accounting information, as well as the planning documents for certain things such as executions and Monotora."

Hayasaka: "W-Wow, haha…" ("Ah, if only Retsuko was still with us, perhaps she would've been able to help us sort through it all, especially with her accounting knowledge…")

Kurumada: “I mean, info’s info, but I was kinda hoping for more clear cut answers of who the hell these bastards behind Nesos even are.”

L: “As a matter of fact, I believe this information is actually rather helpful as long as we analyse the numbers.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, well count me ‘outta that in that case.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, so what’re you doing now, L?”

L: “I’ve been attempting to brute force my way into one of these computers to see what information may be stored inside. However, without a lot to go on, it’s mainly been trial and error to see what passwords may work. I assume with a more thorough look through the data provided, I’m certain we’ll be able to crack it soon.”

Hayasaka: “I see… Well, good luck on that.”

L: “It’s rather unfortunate, however. I did ask Saiki earlier if he could accompany me on our search, but he ignored me in favour of following Brian elsewhere. He’s a stubborn one, isn’t he?”

Hayasaka: (“It’s probably because of how pushy you’ve been in trying to find out his talent. I doubt he trusts being alone with you due to that…”)

Kurumada: “I ain’t gonna lie, though, I feel like this is finally the push in the right direction we needed. All this shit’s bound to help out.”

L: “Although, this is only due to the murder cases that have been pushing more and more of these islands to be made available to us.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “Ya didn’t have to go n’ ruin the mood by sayin’ that, damnit.”

L: “My apologies.”

After a brisk moment of silence, L returned to tapping on the keyboard.

L: “...You’re free to take a look around the database if you’d like, as long as you return the files to the proper directory.”

The two then decided to take a brief search around, stumbling upon some cabinets filled with all sorts of internal information. Hayasaka picked one out at random that detailed the transactional details for the hotel and its facilities.

Kurumada: “Huh, the hell’s this?”

Hayasaka: “Hm?”

Hayasaka peeked over at Kurumada beside him, who had been flicking through a file himself.

Kurumada: “This looks like the blueprints for somethin’... a giant oven?”

Hayasaka: “ *Ah* –”

The large appliance burning up. The window turning orange and crimson. Mai’s sweltering face obscured by the clouds of thick, grey smoke. Her shaky smile despite her burning skin. Melting. Melting. Dying.

Hayasaka: “ *AH* –!”

Hayasaka hadn’t realised he stumbled backwards into the files behind him until a thunk rang out and a surge of pain crashed onto his body. Kurumada quickly pulled him back up, hands firmly gripping his tensing shoulders.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka – shit! Are you okay?!”

Hayasaka: “Hah… I-I’m… I’m fine… I just…”

Kurumada: “...That was where Mai…?”

Hayasaka couldn't bring himself to answer. He simply gulped as he nodded.

Kurumada: “*... Damnit* .”

Hayasaka: “I… I suppose this is where all the information for the executions is kept, h-haha…”

Despite Hayasaka’s strained laugh to push forward the conversation, his body felt heavy and stiff. Kurumada let him stand on his own as he shoved the file back into the cabinet and slammed the door shut.

Kurumada: “Who the hell are they to have so much fuckin’ money to do this?”

Hayasaka: “I wonder how they’re even getting away with buying such resources without being suspected…”

Kurumada: “Fuck… there’s just way too many files to get through in one sittin’, anyway.”

Hayasaka: “Hey, K-Kurumada… I think we should go back now.”

Kurumada: “Uh, yeah, yeah, that’s fine. I’m feelin’ a bit tired of all this m’self.”

The pair made their way back to the hotel's restaurant, Hayasaka feeling himself be watched over by the other from time to time. The walk had managed to ease his nerves from the previous upbring of the not so pleasant memory, and as everyone gradually arrived back, the conversation began.

Bojack: "So what did we all find this time? And no Todd 2 the arcade doesn't count as helpful."

Jesse: "Don't listen to his borin' ass – the arcade's cool as shit."

Latte: "Oh, an arcade sounds fun! Ah, Natsuki, would you like to tell everyone what we found?"

Natsuki: "Me? Um, well, we looked through the factory where Monotora was supposedly made."

Brian: "M-Monotora was made there…?"

Latte: "Maybe even another little creature too."

Hayasaka: "You're referring to that small collar you found, right?"

Jesse: "Hell, is there like a tiger 2.0 roamin' around that we don't know about?"

L: "I highly doubt Nesos would introduce another robot at this point, seeing how much authority Monotora already holds over things such as the motives and trials."

Kurumada: "What four-eyes found was pretty weird though, eh?"

Brian: "F-Four-eyes? Erm, well, yeah: there's a 'VR facility' with these strange looking headsets."

Saiki: "*It's not like we know what they do, though*."

Jesse: “Holy shit, they got VR here too? That’s dope as shit, man.”

Bojack: “Glad to see you’re enjoying the island provided to you by the company that wants us all to kill each other.”

Brian: “What did you find then, L?”

L: “I came across a rather intriguing database that hosts the financial and internal records for Nesos’ death game. Although I haven’t been successful in unlocking any computers, all files are available at our disposal.”

Natsuki: “Jeeze… Unlike the last island, this place has so much info. It’s gonna be basically impossible to go through it all.”

Jesse: “Hey, it’s not like we got a time limit or nothin’.”

Brian: “But what if Monotora shows up with another motive when a killing hasn’t occurred? It’s happened the last three times, after all…”

L: “Then I advise we should be thorough. We don’t have time to afford to slack off.”

Kurumada: “Oi, what happened to before when ya said you were gonna let us off from workin’ so hard?”

L: “That was before I discovered the new island contained such important data. However, I suppose as long as my established investigation team are willing to help out, then I do not mind whatever the rest of you wish to do.”

Bojack: “Thank god for that. All this walking around has made me tired. And hungry. And thirsty.”

Latte: “I think we’re due a little break for now, anyway.”

As the rest of the group split off for the remainder of the day, Hayasaka watched as L gathered up Brian and Saiki before approaching him last.

L: “Well then, Hayasaka, will you be joining us as well?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, t-that is…”

Kurumada: “Hey!”

Kurumada had slid in between the two, placing a hand on Hayasaka’s shoulder with a stern look.

Kurumada: “D’ya really think Hayasaka’s ready to commit to somethin’ so damn heavy just a day after all that previous shit…?!”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada, it’s fine. I… I don’t mind. Like I said before… I want to do what I can for Mai’s sake.”

Kurumada stared at him for a moment, before dropping his cold look with a sigh.

Kurumada: “...Alright, if ya say so. But I don’t want you to be cooped up in some stuffy room for the next few hours.”

Saiki: “ *That’s a backhanded blow* .”

Brian: “Oh, then I have an idea on where we could go: how about the swings at the park? There’s a lot of fresh air there, and I had a friend back at Sintracorp who used swings to help them calm down.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, that… doesn’t sound like a bad idea, Brian.”

L: “I have no problem with that, however we will have to transport a few files, in that case.”

Kurumada: “I guess that don’t sound too bad. Good luck then.”

After parting ways with Kurumada, the four, guided by L, carried a handful of reports and other data to the park where everything was spread out onto the cobblestone. As L began to sort through the books and papers, Brian offered the swing seats to Hayasaka and Saiki.

Hayasaka: “How come you offered so quickly to come here, Brian?”

Brian: “Um, funny story actually. It’s just… I kinda come here by myself often, I guess? Usually to ease my nerves after a trial or whatnot…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I see… Perhaps I should try doing that myself, haha…”

Hayasaka then turned to Saiki, who was idly rocking his feet back and forth to stimulate a small momentum.

Hayasaka: “I suppose you’re a little old for swings at your age, huh Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *...I find it peaceful* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

L: “Are we all ready to get on task now?”

Brian: “Oh, uh, yeah…!”

Hayasaka and Saiki turned their attention towards L, while Brian walked over and sat beside him.

RECORDS
01101100
01101111
01101100

L: “...Oh?”

Brian: “Erm, I just thought if I sat like you, you wouldn’t feel so alone…?”

L: “They do say imitation is a source of flattery…”

Saiki: “ *What part of this is flattering* ?”

L: “Let’s begin by going through what I’ve gathered thus far. As I’ve been piecing together the financial information, I’ve come to the conclusion that Nesos is a very wealthy company, able to afford all the renovations of the newer facilities as well as the research needed to build something so advanced as Monotora – and the executions to an extent.”

Brian: “Mm… I wonder if Nesos is some sort of prestigious company that keeps its dark side a secret.”

Hayasaka: “If they were an already recognisable company, however, they would’ve never told us to keep their identity a secret in the letter.”

Brian: “Oh yeah…”

L: “...You’re both half correct, if we are to believe Nesos is the back to another company.”

Brian: “Huh? What do you mean by that?”

L: “Think of it as a mafia branch: perhaps they decide to use a pizza shop as their front, only to be using the profits and whatnot to hide their real profession on the inside.”

Brian: “Um… what? When did pizza come into this…?”

Saiki: “ *What a uselessly convoluted metaphor…* ”

Hayasaka: “Ah, w-what I believe L’s trying to say here is that Nesos may be the backside to another company that is public.”

L: “I’m sure you know plenty of companies around you, and rumours on how they may be controlling the dark side of society.”

Saiki: “ *That line of thinking is a little too fictional, you know…* ”

L: “Well, it *is* just a theory. Nesos may just potentially be its own thing just as well.”

Brian: “So which one is more likely?”

L: “I’ll need to do a little further digging to come to a conclusion on that.”

Brian: “Phoof, I still can’t believe one company managed to do all of these horrible things so far: kidnapping, the death game, even getting some of us to kill already…”

L: “It’s not easy to convince people to murder, after all. Even with the motives presented alone, a lot of us were still holding out until the very end.”

Hayasaka: “What’re you talking about…?”

L: “Think back to what Monotora had told us what would theoretically happen if a murder didn’t occur.”

FLASHBACK

Monotora: “Finally starting to understand it, huh? Heheh, congratulations! Of course, no one *has* to die, but remember that you’ll have to live out the rest of your lives on this island, which isn’t ideal for the youngsters, eh? So I’d recommend you get to plannin’ a murder as soon as humanly possible! Yes, full-offence to the non-humans in the crowd, kehehe!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “We’d have to live out the rest of our lives on this island, apparently…”

L: “However, with the motives provided to us each time, it’s obvious Nesos desires the death game to push forward no matter what.”

Saiki: “ *Then they’d just force one of us to kill, maybe…* ”

L: “Exactly. That brings me to believe that there may be a *traitor* in the group.”

Hayasaka: “A… A *traitor* ?”

Brian: “Huh? T-That can’t be possible, can it?”

L: “But you see, with someone among everyone working under Nesos, they have the ability to watch over the group, and commit a murder in the scenario where the rest of us are unconvinced by the current motive.”

Brian: “But couldn’t that mean the traitor’s already dead? Three cases have already happened, after all…”

Hayasaka: (“The three cases… The three executed killers so far… Hiroshi, Kaidou, and Mai… No, none of them could be the traitor. Hiroshi wanted to leave because of the Oni, Kaidou’s murder was an accident, and I knew Mai well enough to say her reasoning was the truth… And there’s no possible way it’s Natsuki, either: she was manipulated into killing by Yuri…”)

Saiki: " *...What if the traitor was Yuri* ?"

Brian: "I guess she is the most obvious choice, huh? I don't think anyone seemed like a traitor except for her…"

L: "We can't be dead set on a single suspect, however. That would only cloud our judgement."

Hayasaka: "...Then, are you saying you want us to suspect everyone else?"

L remained silent at the question, before shaking his head.

L: "As a detective, it's best to keep an open mind."

Hayasaka: ("Regardless, I don't want to necessarily suspect *anyone* . After all, what L's presented is only a theory – a traitor may not even exist at all…")

As the conversation drifted into other aspects of Nesos L wanted to comment on, Hayasaka attempted to let his strained mind and body relax by swaying a little on the swing. At first he felt it to be a bit childish, but after a while the back and forth motion brought more peace than he expected, allowing his mind to focus on the discussion at hand. Once the sun had begun to set behind the trees surrounding the park, the four decided to call it a day. As they all set off back to the hotel with the files in hand, Hayasaka was quietly pulled aside by L.

L: "Hayasaka."

Hayasaka: "Ah? Was there something you needed?"

L: "Yes, I'd like to have an update on your ongoing task regarding Saiki."

Hayasaka: "Oh… To be honest, I really haven't had much time ever since the last murder case held our attention. I apologise…"

L: “Hm, I suppose that’s alright. It’s not so much on the forefront of my agenda for now, as all this new data has gotten me preoccupied enough to put Saiki’s talent to one side.”

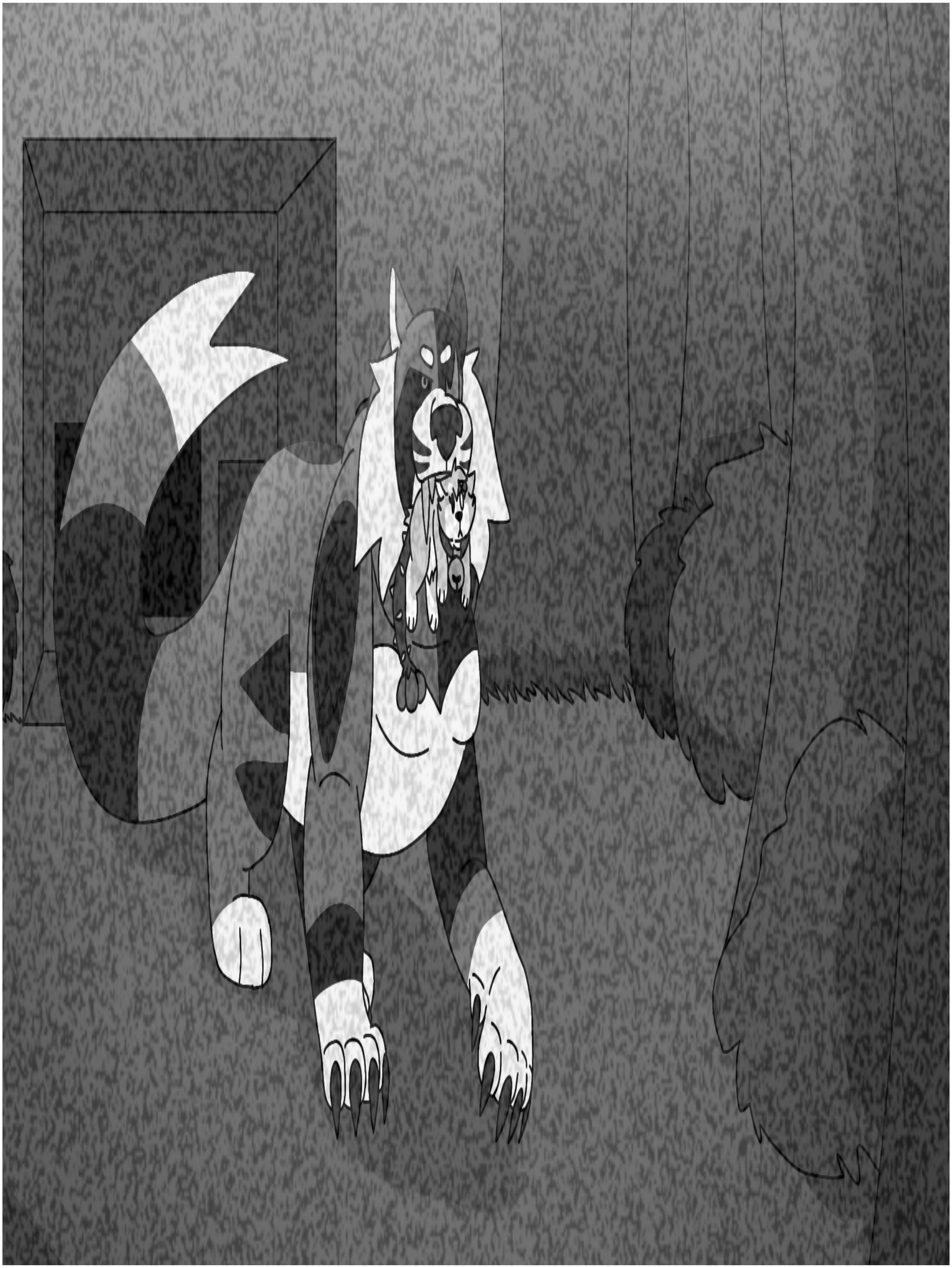
Hayasaka: “I see…” (“It’s probably for the best, of course. We really never should’ve tried to pry him in the first place…”)

After setting the files away, Hayasaka returned to his own hotel room.

Hayasaka: (“Hah, what a long day… I suppose we’re going to be doing a lot of work from now on, considering the mass amount of information we’ve found. Even so, am I doing enough at the moment to call my promise toward Mai stable…? God, just doing anything right now is putting strain on me, haha…”)

Taking a moment to make his bed again after his previous episode from last night, Hayasaka went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-



???: “Entry uhm… Sixteen? Seventeen? No fourteen... Sorry it’s been a while, but we’ve successfully transitioned these robots into their new enclosure and for the past few days, Hana and Tora look to be thrilled about the open area. Though it looks to be fitting for them to be living in a more… natural looking environment? But it’s better than being stuck in an empty room lacking enrichments. And with some notes taken with the interactions, Hana has been a positive note towards Tora’s mood and they’ve taken a liking to her, though their behaviour has slightly altered since the two met. Tora has definitely gotten attached to Hana in some shape or form - it’s rather similar to a guardian dog and small livestock. They won’t let some of us get *too* close to her without curling their huge tail around her and snarling at us, but we make-do and respect their boundaries.

Moving onto the first attempts regarding the experiments with Tora, they’ve already succeeded in agility, operating in complex environments and even tracking down different sizes of prey for their meals. Sometimes I question myself if they’re actually a robot because they’re so… realistic? The boss is certainly pleased with all these results, however… One of my fellow workers has contacted me with recent reports about workers in a nearby section apparently going missing with nothing left behind. While we’re sceptical about this situation, our boss is unbothered by this information. He may be firing those workers, but… Yeah. I'm hoping that’s the case.”

…

Humming under his breath, Hayasaka let his heavy eyes crack open to stare at the ceiling above. As he lay there stagnant, he felt as if a certain formality was missing from this moment – in which he realised the familiar loud chime of the morning announcement was missing. Heaving himself up, he glanced at the clock on the wall. *6:45A.M.*

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I’ve woken up a bit earlier than usual, huh…? Well, there’s no chance I’m going to be able to fall asleep again…”)

Despite his groggy state, he decided to force himself out of bed and ready himself for the restaurant. There, he went to make himself a coffee as he idly waited for everyone else to arrive.

Hayasaka: (“How ironic. Yesterday, I was the last to show up, and today I’m basically the first, haha…”)

As his coffee was being poured, he allowed his eyes to drift around the kitchen. He fondly recalled his baking escapade with the girls, his berry run-in with Saiki, and…

His eyes made a sudden halt on the oven.

The screams. They kept on screaming out her name. The banging. The constant banging on the burning window. The smoke filled his lungs like poison. The banging and the yelling and the burning and the smoke were like a chain, holding him tightly in place. Why couldn't he move? Why the hell could he not move?

Mai was suffering. And he let her die.

???: "Hayasaka!"

Hayasaka: " *Gaah–* !"

Hayasaka blinked rapidly as reality came tumbling back down. His trembling hands were gripping onto the counter, knuckles white and pale. Turning his head towards the doorway, he saw a familiar face painted over in concern.

Brian: "Hayasaka – a-are you okay? You were just… staring at nothing…"

Hayasaka: "B-Brian…? Ah, um, I'm f-fine, I'm just… tired. I woke up earlier than I expected this morning, that's all, h-haha…"

Brian had tilted his head at Hayasaka's almost pathetic scramble at a coherent explanation, but let his worried frown fade into an assured smile to affirm his chuckle.

Hayasaka: "W-Would, *ahem* , would you like some coffee?"

Brian: "Oh, sure. I feel a bit drowsy myself, actually. It's probably from that investigation session yesterday, heh."

After walking back out into the restaurant with a mug each, the two engaged in light conversation as the rest of the group eventually began to trickle inside. However, a certain girl had yet to show up.

Jesse: “Yo, has anyone seen Natsuki this mornin’?”

Latte: “Hm, that’s strange. It isn’t like her to be late…”

Hayasaka: (“Oh dear… She couldn’t be…? No, that’s just absurd to think such a thing could happen so fast…”)

But just as the bad thought had passed over him, Hayasaka picked up on timid footsteps entering the restaurant.

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “Ah, there you are, Natsuki! Good morning!”

Jesse: “Mornin’.”

Despite their greetings, Natsuki remained silent, locking her eyes towards the ceramic tiles below.

Latte: “...Hm? Natsuki, what’s wrong dear?”

Natsuki: “... *Why* ?”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Natsuki: “Why’re you all being nice to me? I’m… I-I’m a *murderer* for god’s sake!”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki… Not only did she lose Yuri, she was also manipulated into killing Ena, and almost died for it…”)

Natsuki: “I don’t get it! Shouldn’t you all be ignoring me – or shouting at me – o-or hurting me for what I’ve done?”

Bojack: “Do you want us to treat you like a person or a criminal for god’s sake?”

Natsuki: “That–Y-You all treated Yuri differently when she messed around with Retsuko’s case!”

Kurumada: “That ain’t the same! She showed no remorse for what fucked up shit she did unlike ya. And anyway, Yuri was the one to manipulate *you* into poisonin’ Ena.”

Natsuki: “...But it’s not–it’s not fair! It’s not fair on the others who also committed murder! Hiroshi, Kaidou, Mai – they all got executed for it – and I didn’t!”

Bojack: “So what?”

Natsuki faltered.

Natsuki: “W…What…?”

Bojack: “You screwed up, got lucky, and lived. The question now is what you plan to do about it. Are you going to internalise this part of yourself, or move on?”

Clenching her fists, Natsuki took a moment to contemplate Bojack's question.

Natsuki: “T-That… I don’t want to move on from Yuri’s death, n-nor Ena’s death, but… I don’t want it to hold me down from continuing on…”

Latte: “You don’t have to strain yourself for the answer just yet – it will come to you in due time.”

Jesse: “Yeah, and you ain’t alone in this, either.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I wonder if the same applies to me with Mai… No, this is Natsuki’s dilemma after all…”)

Following a moment of reflection on Natsuki’s part, she nodded.

Natsuki: “...Sorry for ruining the mood.”

Kurumada: “The mood’s always been shit since people started dyin’. It ain’t your fault.”

Monotora: “Well, since the mood’s already so sour, you should just succumb to ya primal urges, eh? Not need to be shy anymore, kehehe!”

Brian: “M-Monotora–?! Go away, we don’t want you here–!”

Monotora: “ *Anywho* , I know y’all love to investigate the new islands a whole lot. So, let me ask ya this: are you all familiar with the VR facility on the 4th island?”

Brian: “H-Huh?”

Saiki: “ *It looks like they completely ignored you* .”

Hayasaka: (“...I’m going to stop questioning how they manage to sneak in here anymore.”)

L: “The VR facility, hm? Yes, why?”

Monotora: “Y’see, Nesos told me to tell you lot that they’ve done a generous act and left a lil’ clue inside the VR facility that may help ya on your ventures to figure out what the hell’s goin’ on.”

Kurumada: “A clue? Where the hell’s this comin’ from?”

L: “And more importantly, why would Nesos ever want to aid us?”

Monotora: “It’s pretty humouring watchin’ you all struggle for an answer you’ll never reach, y’know. Even if we offered some kinda lifeboat, you’d all just helplessly flail around ‘til ya drowned, gaha!”

Hayasaka heard L scoff.

L: “Even with the Ultimate Investigator?”

Monotora: “ *Grr* … If it were up to me, I would’a ripped ya all to *shreds* right here n’ now. Too bad Nesos has got worse plans for ya all, eh? Kehehe… In my opinion? The opportunity ain’t worth wastin’.”

Sliding their claw down the ceramic tiles of the restaurant with a snarl, Monotora left the group to ponder on the new information.

Brian: “...Um, what should we do…? Should we check it out?”

L: “On one hand, it’s not wise to trust someone as unreliable as Monotota. However, to pass up on what could potentially be a vital clue wouldn’t be so beneficial either.”

Kurumada: “Is it even worth it? Nesos’ already proved themselves to be untrustworthy bastards with the stunt they pulled in the last trial.”

Jesse: “Eh, I mean… I don’t wanna sit around and do jack all after hearin’ it, though. C’mon, just checkin’ it out won’t hurt, yeah?”

Latte: “Maybe… we should go, but we should keep our guard up just in case. How does that sound?”

Natsuki: “...I guess I’m fine with that, as long as everyone else is going.”

Bojack: “Gives me something to do that isn’t just drinking the entire day at least.”

As everyone gradually agreed to tagging along, Kurumada placed his hand on Hayasaka’s shoulder and pulled him close.

Kurumada: “Stay close to me in case somethin’ happens, alright?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, o-okay…”

The trek to the VR facility was quiet, save from a question here and there on what they were to expect from Monotora’s vague claim of a ‘clue’. Once they had arrived, however, Hayasaka felt as if nothing had significantly changed at all.

Brian: “Hm, I don't see anything different from before…”

Latte: “Let’s look around, just to make sure.”

But even as the group checked around every sofa chair, computer monitor, and even the servers, they had come up empty handed.

Natsuki: “Ugh! Monotora totally lied to us – that freaking jerk!”

L: “Not quite. I suppose there’s only one thing we haven’t *fully* checked yet…”

Saiki: “ *I guess you mean the VR headsets.* ”

L nodded as everyone looked towards the circle of seats.

Latte: “...Huh? What *are* those? They look a bit odd to me…”

L: “You see, virtual reality is a genre of technology that pushes the boundaries of a metaphysical world from a digitalised interface, which–”

Jesse: “Yeah, you can play some seriously bombass games with this shit–like once me n’ my friend Skinny Pete tried out this zombie game at a store and it really felt like I was there shootin’ their brains out, man.”

Bojack: “I don’t think I learned anything from either of those explanations.”

Latte: “I think I understand it… sort of?”

Kurumada: “And are you suggestin’ we just shove some machine onto our heads without givin’ a shit about what could happen?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose it would be a bit reckless, h-haha…”

L: “Even if it might be dangerous, we can’t risk the chance of ignoring something that can help us. There’s always a possibility Nesos has underestimated just how important their clue could be to us.”

Brian: “What about all the information in the database? Isn’t that more than what we ever expected to get?”

L: “I’ve already gotten a pretty stable grasp upon all the information stored inside there. Here, on the other hand, this will be taking a complete risk.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Well if ya so damn sure of yourself, then you can try it out on your own.”

Latte: “We can’t make him do it alone! If anything, we should all do our part and help him out.”

Kurumada: “ *Tch* … What do you think, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “M-Me? Ah, I… I don’t know. What would… What do you think Mai would do…?”

Kurumada: “...She ‘prolly would’a taken up the offer already.”

Natsuki: “So is that what we’re gonna do then…? Are we all gonna try it?”

Brian: “...I guess I don’t mind giving it a shot.”

Bojack: “Alright, let’s just all suffer together if it all goes horribly wrong. How is this even going to work, anyway?”

Before Hayasaka could even ponder upon it, he noticed Saiki had held out a booklet to him.

Hayasaka: “Ah, what is this…? ‘VR headset handbook’...?”

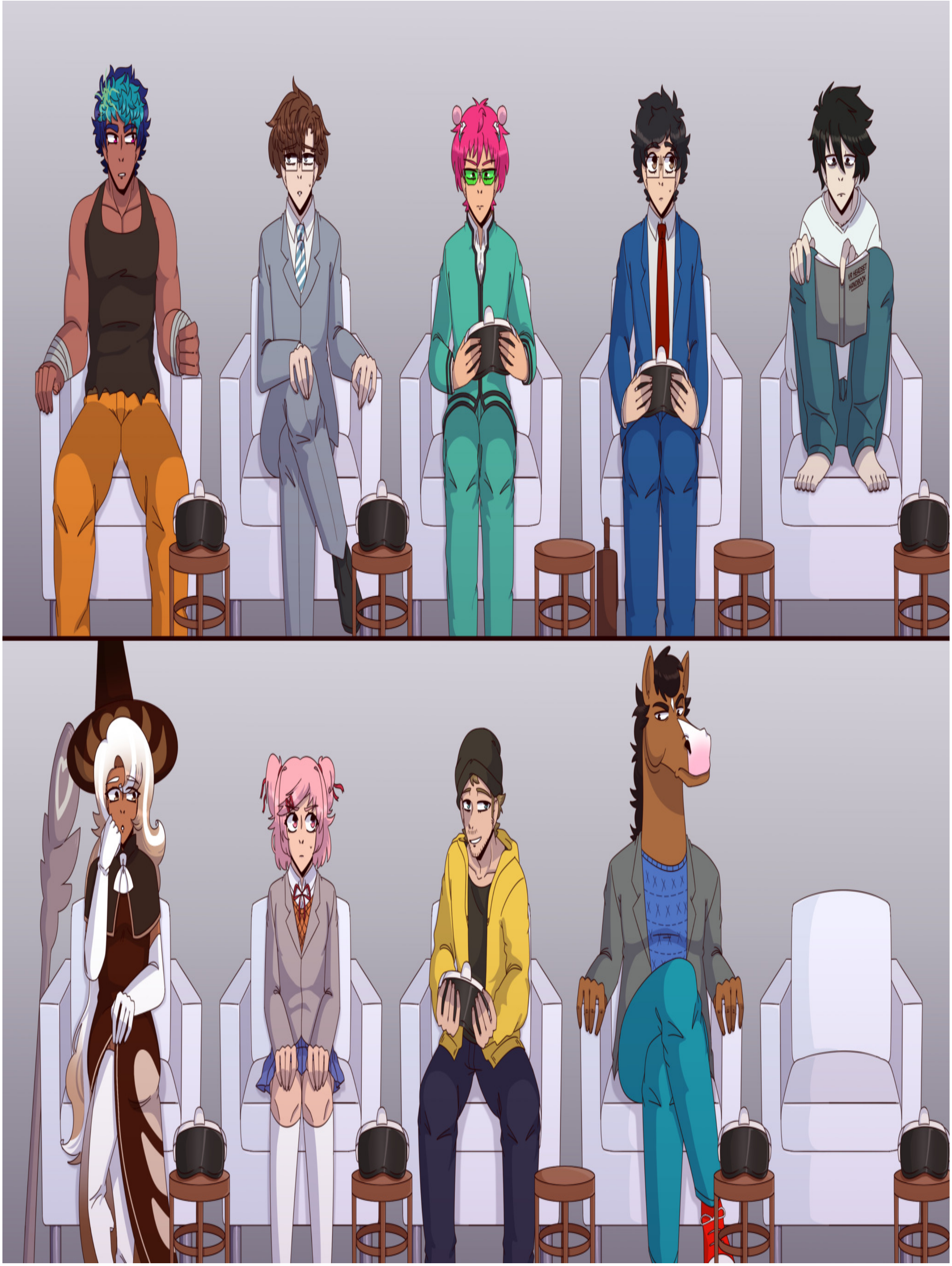
Saiki: “ *I found it on a table over there* .”

Kurumada: “How convenient, eh? What’s it say?”

Hayasaka: “Hum… Apparently the headsets have already been set up. All we need to do to use them is to fit them onto our heads and press the switch on the side.”

Jesse: “Hell yeah. Dibs on the middle seat.”

With the simple yet dubious instructions, the group took their seats on the sofa chairs and began to pick up their respective headsets one by one. As Hayasaka retrieved his, he studied the weighty tech for a moment, feeling the smooth plastic casing along the rim of the headset.


VR HEADSET HANDBOOK

Brian: “Uh, question. Do I need to take off my glasses to wear the headset?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you have a point there, Brian. I didn’t even think of that myself, haha… I suppose since they’ll be rather unnecessary here, we should just take them off.”

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “What’s wrong, Saiki? You don’t want to remove your glasses?”

Kurumada: “D’ya really care that much about your fashion statement?”

L: “It appears it’s not a problem, according to the handbook. It says here the headsets were designed with comfort in mind, quote, ‘allowing every disability to use it’.”

Brian: “D-Disability…? Having glasses isn’t a disability! Why would they put such a rude thing in there?”

Bojack: “Does ‘comfort in mind’ also count for horses? You know, seeing how I’m the only horse and you’re all humans.”

Jesse: “Who cares? I wanna see what this thing does already.”

Natsuki: “So we just have to put it on and press this button, right?”

Kurumada: “Seems simple enough.”

Hayasaka: (“Hoo boy… I suppose we’re really going to be trying this, then. I hope everything goes smoothly.”)

Watching as the others began to fit on their headsets, Hayasaka followed suit. Once he felt it to be comfortable enough on his head, he reached for the button on the side of the headset and, after a moment’s hesitation, pressed it.

And just like that, similar to a switch being flicked on inside his brain, Hayasaka’s consciousness wavered, as if his mind was being pulled somewhere his body was not. The world was drowned in darkness, and an uncertain time between hours and seconds passed before he gained sentience again.

But things had only begun to get stranger from there .

INTO THE VR WORLD [VIDEO]

Once Hayasaka had opened his eyes in an entirely new place, he scanned around to find himself in a cemetery of sorts. The more he focused, however, the more he realised something was off: it didn’t look realistic by any means. In fact, it appeared to be akin to an old video game style with how pixelated everything was.

And then he glanced down at himself. He was exactly the same. His suit, his body, his hands – all flat, not a single part of definition stood out to him.

Needless to say, the absurdity was enough to make him freak out.

Hayasaka: “ *H-Haah* … *Ah* –?!”

A hand suddenly gripped Hayasaka’s shoulder as he whipped his head up to see Kurumada, just as strange-looking as himself.

Hayasaka: “W-What’s… What’s going on…?!”

Kurumada: “Oi, calm down! What’re ya talkin’ about, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “L-Look at yourself, Kurumada!”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

Kurumada peered down at himself, and paused. Hayasaka watched as his face contorted into the same utter shock and astonishment as his.

Kurumada: “WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS–?!”

L: “Quiet down, would you?”

The stern yet emotionless voice snapped the two’s attention up to see L, who had already picked himself up off the floor and was brushing down the dirt that had stuck to his trousers.

Hayasaka: (“Wh… He doesn’t even seem phased at all…”)

As Kurumada helped Hayasaka up, they heard other voices begin to react to the reality-defying situation.

Brian: “W-Well this is… huh? *H-H-Huh* ?!”

Latte: “Oh my! What’s happened to my hands?!”

Natsuki: “What the hell is this?!”

Jesse: “Why am I all 2D n’ shit?!”

Bojack: “OK – who the fuck slipped me ecstasy?”

Saiki: "..."

L: "Hm… So, this is it, then. How intriguing."

Kurumada: "What? What is this?!"

L: "We're inside the VR space. Or the VR world, as the handbook preferred to refer to it as."

Hayasaka: ("This is… the VR world…?")

Natsuki: "J-Jeeze, for such a high-tech set up, we're in a really crappy looking game."

Bojack: "So, just, hang on… What the hell? Seriously, what the hell? Why does everyone look so blocky?"

Latte: "I'm afraid I'm completely lost here, too…"

Brian: "Huh. For how strange this is, I feel kind of… alright, in this state."

Monotora: "Kehehe! Why don't ya stay here forever in that case!"

Brian: "W-What?! N-No! Wait – *you* ?!"

Kurumada: "What the hell?! How the fuck are you here?"

Monotora: "Funny, ain't that? Well, I ain't the 'real' Monotora – y'know, the one that can do shit in the real world – but an AI made to replicate every thought n' action the real one would."

Saiki: “ *And they’re still just as vulgar as the real one …*”

Monotora: “Anyway, welcome to the VR world! Right now, y’all are in the spawn room.”

Latte: “Huh? What’s a spawn room?”

Jesse: “It’s like the place your character loads first when you boot up a game.”

Bojack: “Can someone just tell me why we look so strange?”

Monotora: “That’s ‘cuz your consciousnesses have been uploaded into these here avatars.”

Bojack: “What the fuck’s an avatar?”

Saiki: “ *Good grief …*”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I believe it’s a stand-in character for yourself, such as a video game protagonist, haha…”

Jesse: “My personal favourite protag’s gotta be Soap Mactavish, heheh.”

Natsuki: “Mine’s definitely got to be the Villager.”

Saiki: “ *That wasn’t an excuse to shill your favourite video games …*”

Monotora: “You can move, talk, and do whatever the hell else ya normally do in your actual bodies, but in these ones instead.”

L: “That’s rather curious…”

Brian: “Huh? Why’s that?”

L: “It appears everyone’s avatars strike a heavy resemblance to our actual selves, which is odd considering this would’ve been needed to be pre-organised by Nesos for that to happen.”

Monotora: “Kehehe, you’re correct there, ya bastard. There were even planned avatars for everyone else – s’a shame that they’ll remain as unused content, eh?”

Hayasaka: “...”

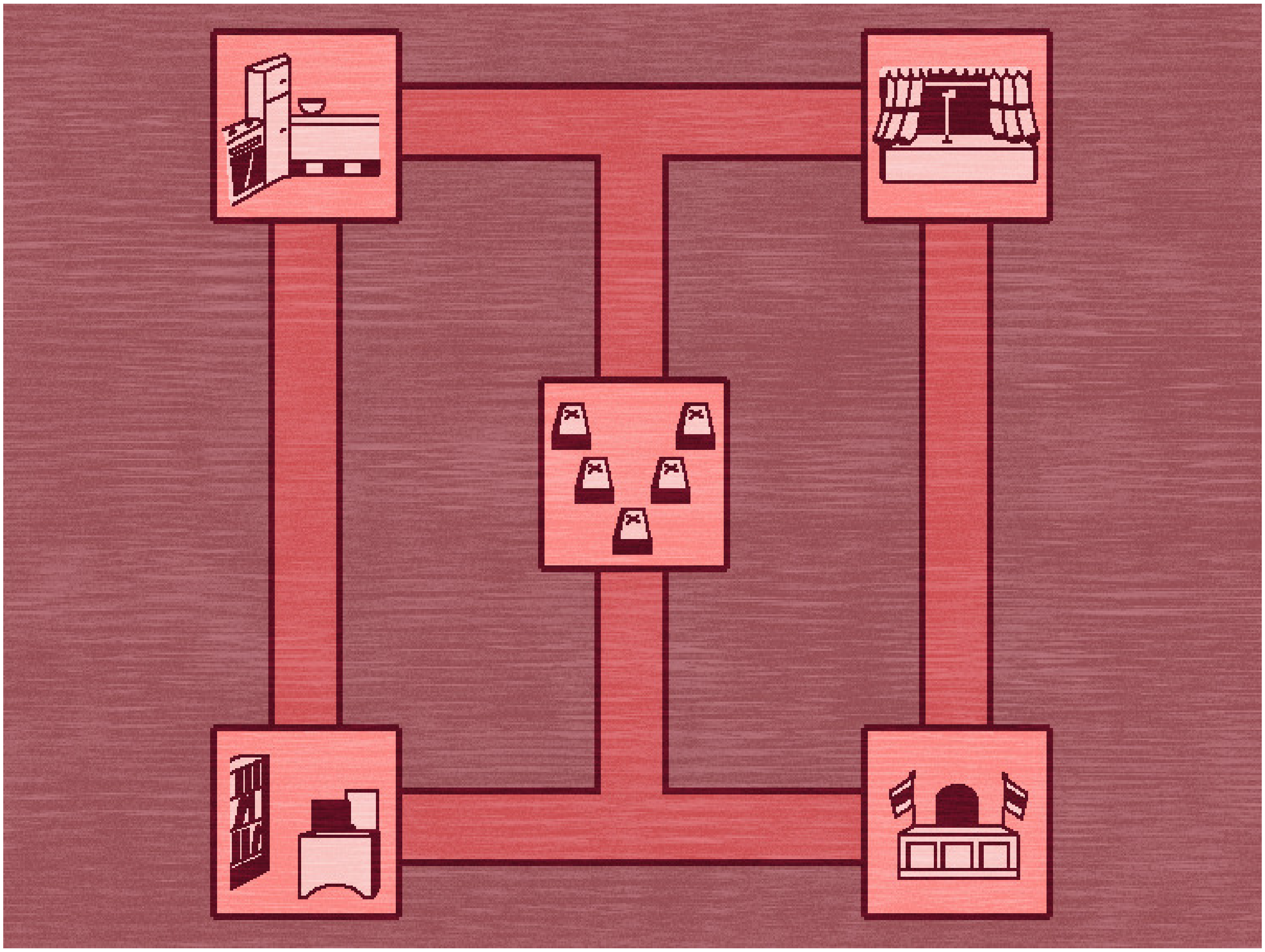
Kurumada: “Damnit, so what the hell are we even s’posed to do here?”

Monotora: “Are you an idiot or somethin’? You’re here to look for the clue we left for ya.”

Bojack: “Well, that’ll be easy. This room isn’t even that big.”

Monotora: “Ah, ah, it’s not just this room: there’s four more outside of this one to explore. Lookie here!”

Monotora produced a map from seemingly out of nowhere.



Kurumada: “Alright, so let’s just head to one altogether then, eh?”

Monotora: “Nuh-uh! I ain’t gonna let ya do it like that! That’s hardly gonna be any fun at all!”

Brian: “I-Is this supposed to be fun…?”

Monotora: “Unfortunately, the clue’s been ripped into itty bitty pieces scattered around the map. You’ll have to split up to find these pieces.”

Kurumada: “Argh! Why’ve ya made it so damn annoying for?”

Monotora: “ *Because none of you can leave until you find all the pieces* .”

Hayasaka: “W-What do you mean by that…?”

Monotora: “Kehehe, until all of the pieces have been brought back together, it’s impossible to leave.”

Natsuki: “What the? That’s stupid. Surely we can just leave right now if we wanted.”

L: “...But, they’re correct. We have no known method of returning to the real world, and perhaps this clue is the only key out of here.”

Kurumada: “Goddamnit! Why’re you even doin’ this in the first place?!”

Monotora: “I just wanna have some fun with the rest of ya while I can, y’know? Oh, I just got an idea, kehehe! *I’ll* be the one to choose how you all split up!”

Hayasaka: (“This can’t be good…”)

Monotora: “Hey, Kurumada, since ya wanna be so loud, you’ll be searchin’ with the awfully quiet Latte.”

Latte: “Ah, I’m sorry. I’ve just been so overwhelmed with everything so far, but I don’t mind working with you, Kurumada!”

Kurumada: “... *Tch* , s’pose I don’t mind either.”

Monotora: “Hm… Yeah! L n’ Bojack! That’s a funny duo – ‘cuz ya both got black hair!”

Bojack: “Really? That’s a crappy reason.”

Brian: “H-Hey, I have black hair too! Why aren’t I–”

Monotora: “Let’s do Hayasaka n’ Saiki next! Both of ya got lame ass glasses!”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“I’m with Saiki again, huh? I suppose that’s one of the better outcomes here, haha…”)

Brian: “Wait, I have glasses too–!”

Monotora: “And finally, we’ll go for Jesse n’ Natsuki, seein’ as ya both pretty savvy with the VR world already, keheh.”

Jesse: “I’m cool with that.”

Natsuki: “...Yeah.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, what about Brian?”

Monotora: “Eh? Brian? I guess he can just stick to the cemetery.”

Brian: “Huh? Why can’t I just join a pair…?”

Monotora: “I can watch over ya if you’d like to be paired so badly~!”

Brian: “N-N-No!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! Now then, scram already! And don’t come back until ya got all the pieces!”

Monotora then pounced off.

L: “It appears we have no choice but to search for those missing pieces. Come now, Bojack, we’ll take the south-east room.”

Bojack: “Whatever. I’ll just let you do the work.”

Hayasaka: “Will you be alright here on your own, Brian?”

Brian: “Erm, yeah, don’t worry about me. We’re better off focusing on finding these pieces, anyway.”

As the pairs began to split off, Hayasaka and Saiki decided to follow the south exit and turned west until they hit a new room. Hayasaka gazed around the oddly sophisticated room, seeing bookcases, a desk and a laptop, and a few paintings hung around.

Hayasaka: “This appears to be a study of sorts… I suppose one of the ‘pieces’ is hidden in here.”

Saiki: “ *I guess we’ll just have to look around* .”

The two then got to work poking and prodding around the study in search of whatever the piece would turn out to be. While sifting through a bookshelf, Hayasaka glanced over at Saiki. He then cleared his throat to garner his attention.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki… What do you think of the VR world so far? Do you think it’s suspicious?”

Saiki: “ *Not really. It’s a little lack-lustre if anything.* ”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

An unsuccessful check of the bookshelf led Hayasaka to walking behind the desk, only to pause as he tilted his head at something on the wall.

Hayasaka: (“What is this…? There’s a small dent in the wall, as if something was poked into the wallpaper…”)

His eyes wandered down the wall until they hit the floor, making contact with something on the ground below.

Hayasaka: (“An arrow…? Perhaps that was what was shot into the wall?”)

Turning back around, Hayasaka stepped away from the odd scene, just to be caught off guard by a faint blood stain right under his shoe.

Hayasaka: “G-Gah–!”

Saiki turned his attention to Hayasaka’s small freak out, raising a brow as if to ask what was wrong.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki, I, um… think I’ve just found blood on the carpet here. Haha, it almost feels like a crime scene.”

Saiki: “ *I wonder if it actually is* .”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?”

Saiki then pointed towards the opposite wall, littered with a multitude of shallow slashes.

Hayasaka: “...Something bad must’ve happened here. But how? Isn’t this just a VR simulation?”

Saiki: " *Maybe that's exactly what it is. Just a simulation of a crime* ."

Hayasaka: ("Perhaps Saiki's right… But then, why would anyone want to simulate a murder crime scene?")

Shaking off the oddities in the study as best as he could, Hayasaka returned to his search. Not long after, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

Saiki: " *I found this between two books* ."

Resting in Saiki's palm was a small, electronic piece.

Hayasaka: "Ah, do you think that's the piece we're looking for?"

Saiki: " *I don't see it being anything else. Now we can finally go back* ."

Before Saiki could turn and walk off to the doorway, however, Hayasaka stopped him.

Hayasaka: "Saiki… I just realised something. This morning, a-and yesterday, you weren't wearing your earphones at all… Did you lose them recently?"

Saiki shook his head.

Saiki: " *I don't want to use them anymore. I'm ready to start listening again* ."

Hayasaka: ("That… That's a strange way to word it, but… I'm glad Saiki's slowly working past his grief…")

Hayasaka flashed him a small smile before they set off back for the cemetery. As they arrived, they noticed Brian idling around with something in his grip.

Brian: “Oh, hey guys! Did you manage to find a piece?”

Saiki held up the electronic object.

Hayasaka: “Fortunately, haha. How about you?”

Brian: “Yep, I found one after digging around the coffins. Man, are those things heavy or what…”

Not long after, the rest of the pairs began to return back, each with their own retrieved piece.

Kurumada: “Jesus, why’d they have to make it so damn difficult to get this small ass shit?”

Hayasaka: “What do you mean?”

Kurumada: “The piece Latte n’ I found was on top of this spice shelf. We had to knock it down usin’ her spoon.”

Natsuki: “Spice shelf? What kind of room did you go to?”

Latte: “Ah, it was just a kitchen, but it was a bit odd: there was a giant pool of blood in the middle of the room, and a frying pan laying beside it. Kurumada was almost about to step in it before I stopped him.”

Kurumada: “Hey! I was just checkin’ if it was real, alright?”

Jesse: “Huh, that’s weird. Me n’ Natsuki saw somethin’ similar to that – we went to this room with a giant ass stage, and there were a bunch’a ropes tied to the railings.”

Natsuki: “Not to mention the mic stand lying beside the door…”

Hayasaka: (“So… each room contained a strange set-up, then?”)

L: “...That is rather fascinating. I suppose that means my original suspicions were correct: each room here has been designed to represent a murder case of sorts. I had begun to theorise that as the room we ventured to contained a large trail of blood leading towards a principal’s desk.”

Bojack: “I still can’t believe I was the one to find the piece because he got so side-tracked on this useless ‘murder mystery’ set-up bullshit. And here I thought I was the lucky one to be paired with the detective.”

Natsuki: “Still, isn’t all this just… weird? Why would anyone want to make something like that?”

Monotora: “Bingo! It’s ‘cuz that’s exactly what this place was made for!”

Latte: “Oh dear! You really need to let us know when you’re going to appear…”

Saiki: “ *Why’re you saying it like they’re our friend* ?”

Hayasaka: “Wait… A-Are you saying the purpose of the VR world is to simulate murder cases…?”

Monotora: “You bet ya ass it is! Nesos have been plannin’ this death game for a long, long time, and one of these aspects was to simulate murders to capture just exactly how one could potentially go down! Ain’t that some real dedication?”

L: “Interesting…”

Latte: “I just see that as distasteful…”

Monotora: “Welp, I assume you’ve all scurried back ‘cuz you’ve found all the pieces, hm?”

Brian: “I guess so. But you really didn’t need to make us go through all that hassle to–”

Monotora: “Good! Now give ‘em here!”

Just as sudden as they spoke, Monotora snatched up the pieces from everyone and began to fix them all together in an abnormal, almost cartoonish way until the random pieces turned into a remote control.

Hayasaka: (“Well that’s… certainly one way to do it.”)

Monotora: “Wallah!”

Kurumada: “What the?! How the hell was that even possible?”

Jesse: “It kinda reminded me of how some games’ll turn parts into weapons with these cheesy-ass animations.”

Bojack: “Christ, I don’t care anymore. Please just let me out of here already.”

Monotora: “Kehehe! I s’pose since you all played my game to my standards, you can leave now. Cya later, bozos!”

With one click of the remote, Hayasaka’s senses immediately began to waver just like before. The world around him fizzled out into darkness – his existence stagnant for a moment – before instantly feeling himself back in his real body: the headset on his face, the soft plush of the sofa chair, even the cool air hitting the back of his neck.

Hayasaka: (“I’m back… I’m back to normal. Hah, thank god for that…”)

Removing his headset, Hayasaka observed the rest of the group in a similar dreary state to himself, the effects of the experience clearly taking a toll on some more than others.

Latte: “Oh my… Is everyone alright? I feel a bit woozy after all that. I don’t think I favour going back there.”

Bojack: “I need to sleep the rest of the day off if I’m ever going to recover from that.”

Jesse: “Damnit, I was hopin’ for it to be a cool FPS game… Yeah, bitch, chopper gunner.”

Saiki: “ *Why do you want this to be a video game so badly* ?”

Brian: “Hum… I wonder why we were made to look at Nesos’ ‘murder simulations’?”

L: “I have my bets that they didn’t expect us to learn anything from it. However, I believe it’s compelling to factor how Nesos would need to create simulations in the first place. Monotora did say Nesos has been planning this death game for a long time…”

Hayasaka: (“But just how long…? Months? Years? Could I have ever been involved with something so far back in the past to end up here?”)

Natsuki: “Ugh, I’m way too tired to even try to think about this…”

Latte: “I say we all rest for today. I think we deserve a break after that.”

Kurumada: “I need some down-time to get my mind off’a all this shit, anyway. Just who do these bastards think they are makin’ all this?”

As everyone began to part ways for the remainder of the day, Hayasaka opted to linger outside the VR facility for a moment.

Hayasaka: ("That was all quite a lot to take in. Murder simulations… That in of itself won't help us get any closer to Nesos' true identity, but it's still something to keep in mind. For now, I think it's best to wind down, haha… Let's see… Perhaps I'll go find someone to talk to?")

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Kurumada in the sports centre.

Kurumada: "Shit, how am I gonna keep up on my diet if they ain't even got the proper supplements here?"

Hayasaka: "Hello, Kurumada. Do you want to… hang out for a while?"

Kurumada: "'Course! But you don't gotta be all formal n' shit – you know me! Bwaha."

Hayasaka spent some time with Kurumada. Weighing his options over whether he should bother giving him a present, he gifted him a pair of boxing gloves.

Kurumada: "...Heh. What's this? Some kinda gesture?"

Hayasaka: "N-No, um, I just thought you'd appreciate a gift."

Kurumada: "If ya insist. They look pretty sturdy. Thanks."

Hayasaka: "I'm glad you like them, haha."

Kurumada: "I'm flattered ya chose to talk to me out of anyone else. I'm a lucky guy, eh?"

Hayasaka: "W-What's that even supposed to mean? It's just… right now, I suppose I'd rather stick to someone I already know. It puts less pressure on me."

Kurumada: “Never been all that good at comin’ outta ya comfort zone, huh? No offence, I mean.”

Hayasaka: “ *Sigh* , It’s not like none can be taken when you’re exactly right. It’s not just that, anyhow. I was actually a little eager to catch up with you, since I’ve been so busy with work outside the island.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Well, boxing’s as tight as usual. Career’s doin’ well. Though, that should’ve been pretty obvious, considerin’ my ultimate title. Then again, why the hell do we need ultimates anymore, anyway? They’re just fuckin’ useless.”

Hayasaka: “That is true… I’m impressed you were granted Ultimate Boxer out of anyone else, however, haha…”

Kurumada: “Baha, are ya tryin’ to make me feel better?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well… I’m sorry. Was it that obvious?”

Kurumada: “Naw, it’s cool. Just seein’ ya makes me feel better. Anyway, I’m *the* Convertible of Destruction, so ‘course I’d be the Ultimate Boxer, title given or not. I just wish there were better facilities on these islands. Haven’t been given a boxing ring or nothin’ yet.”

Hayasaka: “How about the gym in the sports centre?”

Kurumada: “It’s alright, but the equipment’s basic as fuck.”

Hayasaka: “Haha, perhaps you could ask Monotora for some better equipment in that case?”

Kurumada: “I’d like to use Monotora *as* equipment…”

Hayasaka: “I-I was just joking! You’re not planning to square up against them again, are you…?”

Kurumada: “Nah, nah – didn’t mean it like that. I’m just sayin’ if that bastard wasn’t our enemy, then they’d make a great partner to practise with. Not a lot of ya are all that health-crazed, y’know?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you *are* the only one with a sports-related talent, aren’t you? …I’d volunteer to help, but I’m probably one of the weakest people here, haha.”

Kurumada: “*... Damn* .”

Hayasaka: “W-What?”

Kurumada: “That’s it! I could teach ya a thing or two about boxin’. That way, I can finally have a practise partner, plus, you can have some self-defence skills under ya belt.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, that’s a little… I-I’m unsure if someone like me is really cut out for that…”

Kurumada: “C’mon, I’ll be gentle with my teachin’, heheh.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s not what I was talking about, but, I suppose I don’t mind doing something again with Kurumada…”)

The two parted ways after a little while. Seeing how there was still time in the day before evening, Hayasaka scouted for someone else to chat with.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Saiki in his hotel room.

Saiki: “ *It’s best I just haul all the coffee jelly into my room so other people stop taking it all* …”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Saiki.”

Saiki: “ *I think I understand why you’re here. If you want to talk, I guess I don’t mind this time* .”

Hayasaka spent some time with Saiki. Smiling nervously, he gifted Saiki a coffee jelly maker.

Saiki: “…!”

Hayasaka: “Since I found out that you like coffee jelly now, I thought this would make you happy…?”

Saiki: “ *...It’s nice. Thank you* .”

Hayasaka: (“Was it just me, or did I see him crack a smile? Ha, I’m really glad he likes it.”) “So, what makes coffee jelly so good to you?”

Saiki: “ *It’s just an overall expertly designed dessert. The cream and the coffee blend together well, as the bitter and sweet tastes balance each other out* .”

Hayasaka: “I see… I-I guess I’ve never thought about coffee that way before, seeing as I drink it all the time and hardly pay any attention to the taste anymore, haha…”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “Ha…” (“Uh, well that didn’t push the conversation very far. And here I thought I finally found something to talk about with Saiki…”)

Saiki: “ *Hayasaka* .”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Saiki: “ *Why are you bothering trying to talk to me in the first place* ?”

Hayasaka: “T-That… Ah, I guess I just want to get to know you a little better, a-as I wish to do with the others…”

Saiki: “ *I can tell you’re just forcing yourself with these bland conversation topics. I’d rather be left alone, anyway. I don’t like to attract attention* .”

Hayasaka: “How would me talking to you attract attention? If anything, I’m a rather average person. I-I doubt I could do much, haha…”

Saiki: “ *It’s not that. It’s simply because I live an abnormal life.* ”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Saiki: “ *I have a weird family, I attract weird friends, weird occurrences happen in my life daily. It’s disastrous and I’m tired of it. I just wish to live a peaceful life where I can be left alone with a book and coffee jelly. But, I know I’ll never be allowed that ideal life, so…* ”

Hayasaka: (“Saiki… I didn’t know you felt this way. However…”) “I… feel the same way as you, Saiki. My job is a remedy for stress, and my friends – although I enjoy their company a lot – are tiring to keep up with. I’m glad Kurumada and Mai have always respected my introverted nature, if I have to be honest.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I’m sorry, Saiki. Perhaps that wasn’t the same. I know I can’t exactly understand your problems, but I wanted you to know that you’re not alone? I-If that makes any sense, haha.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “...”

Saiki: “*... Thank you, Hayasaka.* ”

Hayasaka: “F-For what?”

Saiki: “ *For being normal. At the start of these conversations, I assumed I was going to despise your company. But I haven’t minded them as much as others, really.* ”

Hayasaka: “Haha… Really? That’s, well, that’s nice to hear. D-Does that mean we can talk more often? Perhaps with a book and coffee jelly, like you wanted.”

Saiki: “ *...I suppose so* .”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t help but smile. I think I’ve finally managed to get along with Saiki? At least next time I can do less talking, haha…”)

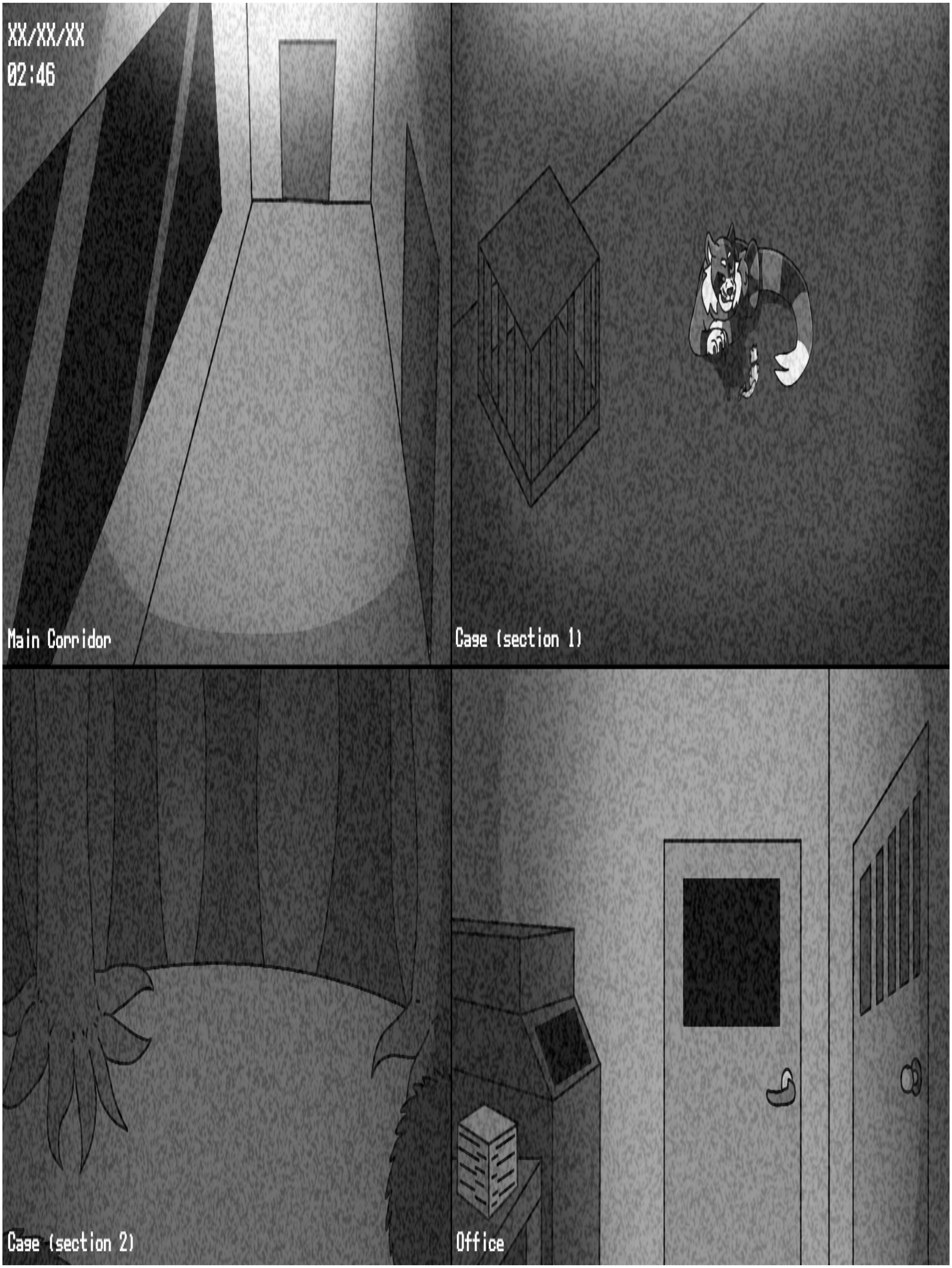
Time passed by until the nighttime announcement struck. Returning to his hotel room, Hayasaka gently rubbed his temples.

Hayasaka: (“To think I’d ever experience such a thing in my life as entering a virtual reality world is definitely odd, to say the least. Even so, what we saw there has to be important. I can only assume L might have some theories about it in the morning…”)

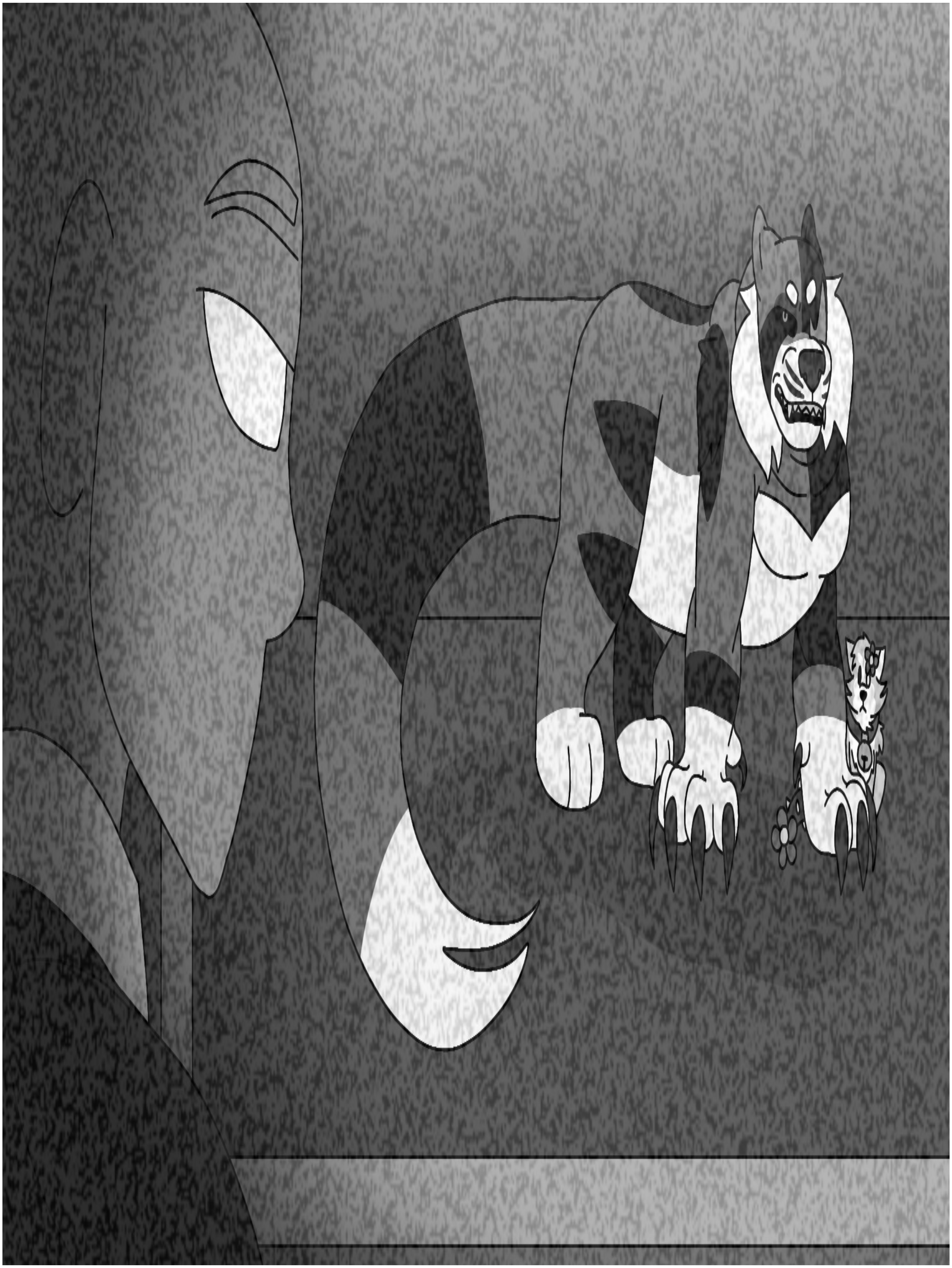
Letting no more thoughts ponder on the topic, Hayasaka soon went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

???: “Entry fifteen: it’s been forty-eight hours since, and already two workers have also gone missing – which totals to ten workers disappearing within these last few days. While the security for the robots is highly protected, one of us has placed cameras in hidden locations to ensure secrecy of catching the people that wound up disappearing. As workers from another sector suspect it's the robots behind this and putting the blame on us three caretakers, I can't help but think something else is going on.


XX/XX/XX
02:46
Main Corridor
Cage (section 1)
Cage (section 2)
Office

In the meantime, one of us has pointed out that Monotora's behaviour has subtly shifted. They seem to be more active with repetitive behaviours such as tail flicking and pacing around, especially in the late hours of the night. And it’s not just that: they've grown to become defensive around Hana when the boss is at the window observing them. They're just as aware as us with how the boss behaves towards anyone, but they haven’t resorted to aggression as of now. I could suspect that if pushed far enough, they'll snap and break out if some aren't as reckless as the boss is currently."



DING DONG, BING BONG

???: “ *Hayasaka* …”

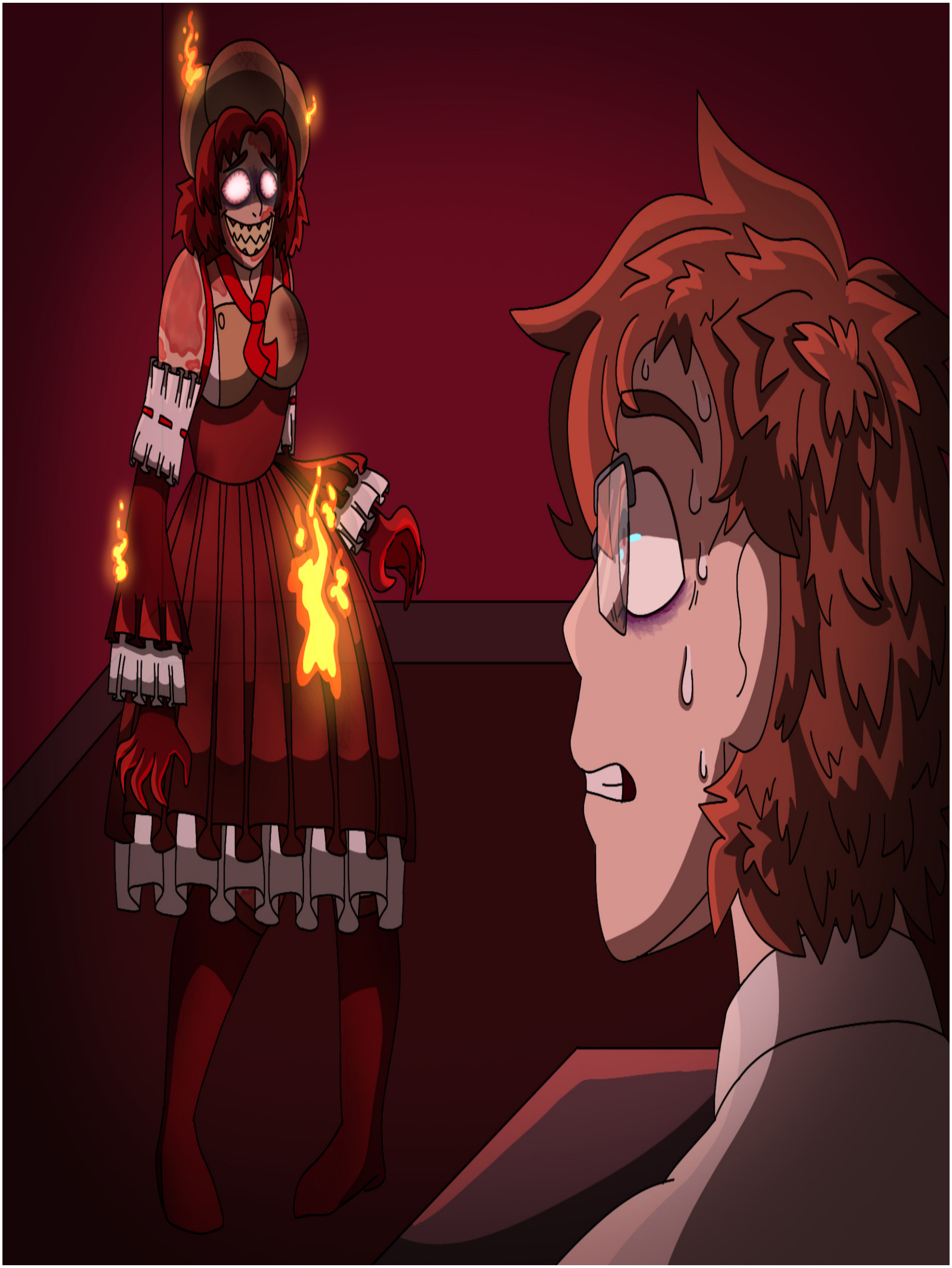
Hayasaka: “ *Nn* -huh…?”

Before Hayasaka had the chance to process the announcement, a voice managed to drown it out. Its tone was sweet, stark and crisp in his ears as if it had come from inside his own head. Confused, yet somewhat curious, he opened his eyes and located his glasses before scanning around the room for the source of the voice.

And then he saw her.

There, at the edge of his bed, was *Mai* .

No, that couldn’t be. Was it Mai? How could this be Mai? But the longer he stared, the more Hayasaka realised she looked different. Completely different. Instead of her familiar bubbly smile, this figure bore a horrific grin that stretched far against her cheeks, as if it were ripping her own flesh. Her skin was black, burnt and charred. Her posture was slanted, trying to keep herself upright despite her painful state. Her bright red pupils were gone – leaving only a white gaze piercing into Hayasaka’s frozen soul.



Hayasaka: ("W-What… What is this…?! M-Mai?! Oh god – am I dreaming? G-Going insane?")

Mai?: " *Hayasaka…* "

Despite her sultry whisper, the figure's words pierced his ears.

Mai?: " *Why did you let me die…? Why didn't you care enough to pry me out of that oven…? Why didn't you risk your life for mine…?* "

Hayasaka: "I-I…"

It was no use answering back. Hayasaka felt his throat lock up.

Mai?: " *Tsk… What a useless waste of space you are. You should have died instead of me.* "

Hayasaka: "W-Wh….M-Ma–"

???: "GAAH–!"

Hayasaka: "H-Huh…?!"

A muffled scream from outside his hotel room snapped Hayasaka's attention towards the door. As he glanced back at his bed, however, he noticed that Mai was gone. Trembling for a moment, he decided to push the occurrence to one side as he dashed to get ready and leave his room. That's when he saw someone at the far end of the hall: it was Natsuki, holding her shaking body in an alarmed state. Speeding towards her, Hayasaka held his breath.

Hayasaka: "Natsuki, w-what's wrong?"

Natsuki: "I-I saw Yuri!"

Hayasaka: “W-What…?”

Natsuki: “I did! I-I swear I just saw Yuri walk out of her hotel room–with a knife in her–a-and she was just there and–and now she’s not–! I know it’s impossible, b-but…”

Hayasaka: “C-Calm down… Just take a moment to breathe, okay…? It was probably just your imagination…”

Natsuki nodded, attempting to take some deep breaths.

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki saw Yuri…? But, that can’t…”)

Natsuki: “...Hey, um, Hayasaka… Is it normal to see dead people when grieving…?”

Hayasaka faltered for a moment.

Hayasaka: “T-That… Ah, everyone’s experience is different. B-But, you have nothing to worry about…”

Natsuki: “...Okay.”

Hayasaka: “I can, um, walk you to the restaurant if you’d feel safer that way, h-haha…”

Natsuki: “Oh, thank you…”

Upon arriving at the restaurant, however, Hayasaka was met with more people in a similar state to how he and Natsuki were before: disturbed, quiet, and almost paranoid. Approaching Brian, Hayasaka cleared his throat, making him jolt rather frightfully.

Brian: “H-Hah–! Oh, it’s just you, Hayasaka. Erm, sorry about that… I’m just a little on edge right now.”

Hayasaka: “What? How so…?”

Brian: “I… It was weird. While I was walking to the restaurant, I saw Hiroshi, a-and Retsuko, and even Ena just… there. I-I mean, they were gone when I blinked, but…”

Hayasaka: “T-That is…”

Hayasaka didn’t know how to reply; he felt an unexplained dread arise in his stomach. Even when he watched the late-comers arrive, they all appeared just as distressed. Not even Kurumada was spared, Hayasaka spotting how his fists were tightly clenched.

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada… Is everything alright?”

Kurumada: “Er… Shit. I just–I dunno how to explain it, but… While I was busy goin’ at my usual punchin’ bag in the gym… I swear it turned into Mai for a sec. Almost made me lose my damn balance…”

Hayasaka: (“So it wasn’t just me then – Kurumada also saw Mai? But, why’re we all seeing these things? I don’t…”)

Natsuki: “So it wasn’t just me then?”

Jesse: “Yeah – I thought I was goin’ crazy when I saw him there…”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…?”)

Kurumada: “Damnit – just what the hell is goin’ on?!”

L: “Has everyone experienced a strange hallucination this morning?”

Latte: “Hallucination? I… suppose I have been seeing some odd things lately…”

L: “...It’s rather curious how this has only started up today.”

Hayasaka: (“This can’t be connected to something, can it…?”)

Bojack: “Don’t tell me we all ate something off.”

L: “No, it’s more likely to be something else entirely…”

Brain: “W-What is it…?”

Monotora: “Kehehe! What a shitty day y’all are havin’, eh?”

Kurumada: “Oi! What’s so funny? What the hell have you done to us?!”

Monotora: “Oh god! It’s a tragedy! You’re all goin’ mad! Gahaha!”

Natsuki: “M-Mad?! What the hell are you talking about?”

Monotora: “Ahem – I guess I should get the formalities outta the way. Welcome to the next motive, ya bastards!”

Saiki: “ *The motive* ?”

Jesse: “You’re tellin’ me *this* is the motive? No way, man. What – were we all slipped a pill or injection or some shit to make us start seein’ things?”

Monotora: “Kehehe… Nope. We didn’t have to touch ya at all for this. I invite ya to guess, though.”

Hayasaka: (“If it’s something where Nesos didn’t have to get physically involved, then…”) “Are you referring to the VR facility…?”

Monotora: “Oh, what an answer. Now, tell me, why were ya all invited there in the first place?”

Brian: “It was to learn about the clue of the murder simulations, right…?”

Monotora: “That shit? Nah – that was just a distraction to allow the implatin’ of the hallucination program into ya noggins!”

Latte: “Huh…?! Hallucination program?”

Kurumada: “Bullshit! That’s impossible!”

Monotora: “It’s very much possible! You know by now how extremely advanced Nesos’ technology is – don’t you remember that pill I gave ya to snap you all awake after the second motive? How ‘bout all them crazy-ass executions you watched your co-workers suffer from? That ain’t no rickety ‘tech!”

L: “So then your desperation for us to ‘search for the clue’ and ‘look for the pieces’ was merely to keep us distracted?”

Monotora: “We thank you for your gullibleness – it gave the program plenty of time to upload itself into ya brains. And now, you’re all sufferin’ from its effects!”

Bojack: “So what’s even the point of this? Are we just going to be seeing dead people from now on?”

Monotora: “Maybe, maybe not… Y’see, as long as a murder doesn’t occur, these here hallucinations are programmed to get worse n’ worse. At that point, it wouldn’t be unlikely for a few of ya to snap and lunge at the closest target or two.”

Brian: “W-What?! Are you saying you’re going to leave us to go insane…?!”

Latte: “That’s horrible! We’ve come so far for something like that to happen again!”

Monotora: “Does it look like I care? Welcome to my world – kehehehe~!”

And just like that, Monotora was gone. Hayasaka put a hand up to his forehead.

Hayasaka: (“So, what I saw… That was Nesos’ doing? They tricked us into putting on those headsets for the next motive… They… made *us* give ourselves this motive…?”)

Natsuki: “Gh – no way… How many days will this take to get out of hand? This is just gonna be the ‘no-sleep’ motive all over again, and I could barely handle that one!”

L: “I suppose we’ll just have to find out in due time…”

Kurumada: “We can’t just walk around with hallucinations poppin’ out at random times, asshole!”

L: “Unfortunately, Kurumada, there’s not much we can do about it. *Unless* …”

Latte: “Unless what?”

L: “Since this ‘hallucination program’ originated from the VR simulation, there may be a way to remove it with the technology currently still provided to us.”

Bojack: “Screw that – I am not going back into that VR place ever again.”

Jesse: “Yeah, man, like… what if it just makes things worse?”

Brian: “But still, w-we can’t give up! What do you think, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “I…”

Hayasaka felt unable to respond. His mind was conflicted – repeating the scene he had with Mai when he woke up. What she had looked like, what she had said to him, it was hard to suppress.

Latte: “...What do we do now?”

Bojack: “I’m going to get what I came down here for: some goddamn breakfast.”

Saiki: “ *It looks like he doesn’t care at all* …”

It was at this point the group had split off to their usual routines, leaving the conversation at a wary conclusion. Before Hayasaka could decide on his next move, a hand planted itself on his shoulder as he looked up to see Kurumada, who sported a sheepish glint in his eye.

Hayasaka: “Is something wrong, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Heheh, uh, looks like my plans for today have been ruined by this damn motive. Still, somethin’ inside me wants to try askin’ ya anyway.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? What’re you talking about?”

Kurumada: “D’ya wanna, er, do somethin’ together again later? I was thinkin’ we could just hang in the restaurant to keep things simple.”

Hayasaka: “T-That… Ah, is this really the most appropriate time for something like that, however?”

Kurumada: “I know, I know, but I’m only suggestin’ it ‘cuz of what Mai said to us, y’know? And, hey, it wouldn’t hurt to spend some time with each other. Might distract us from this hallucination bullshit.”

Hayasaka: (“What Mai said…”)

FLASHBACK

Mai’s smile only grew wider, taking both their hands and enveloping them in one another’s as her voice was confined to a low tone.

Mai: “...The least I can do is give you two a push for the future.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “I… I suppose you’re right. Then… mm, p-perhaps I’d like to as well…”

Kurumada then gave him a smile.

Kurumada: “Heh, cool. Meet me here at the restaurant around 8-ish, yeah?”

Hayasaka nodded as the two parted ways. With the newfound time he had on his hands for the remainder of the day, he thought it’d be best to find someone to talk to.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Natsuki in the cafe.

Natsuki: “The restaurant hardly has any good drinks… I wonder if the supermarket has anything sweeter?”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Natsuki. Would you like to hang out again?”

Natsuki: “Oh, you came back? I didn’t expect you to… Well, in that case, I guess we can…”

Hayasaka spent some time with Natsuki. Hoping she’d enjoy the activity, he gifted her a friendship quiz magazine.

Natsuki: “Oh, sweet! I didn’t think they had something like… I-I mean, it’s cool. I could do it with another friend, or something…”

Hayasaka: (“I’m glad to see she liked it.”)

Natsuki: “...I’m kinda surprised you came back, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “W-Why’s that? I was curious about the manga you mentioned before, and it’s definitely been quite a while for me since I’ve read any, haha…”

Natsuki: “If you’re not lying, then… Parfait Girls, in case you forgot the name or something, is a slice-of-life romance about four girls. You know what ‘slice-of-life’ means, right? That isn’t something you haven’t heard of?”

Hayasaka: “S-Slice-of-life isn’t a new concept… How old do you think I am?”

Natsuki: “Oh. A-Anyways, it’s not just about that, alright? Sure, it may start out slow, but it gets *way* better once you’re, like, really into it. It explores the characters' backstories and throws some mega touching scenes your way. S-So it’s not simple, if you were thinking that!”

Hayasaka: “I wasn’t doubting the quality or anything. I-I mean, how could I when I haven’t even read it before?”

Natsuki: “True. Haha, then you better like Minori – she’s my favourite character. She gets into tons of back luck, it’s crazy funny. I mean, you do feel bad for her sometimes, but it’s what makes her more than some comic relief gag!”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Natsuki: “Actually, I feel like you’re a bit similar to Minori, Hayasaka, haha.”

Hayasaka: (“Which part about her, exactly…?”)

Natsuki: “Ugh, but, it feels like I can’t explain this perfectly to you ‘cuz I’ve never been able to share my manga with anyone else before – no one takes manga seriously, y’know? They’re really just missing out on good stories. But people only believe good stories come from novels…”

Hayasaka: “Was that meant to be a jab at Yuri…?”

Natsuki: “N-No! It’s just… It took a while to convince Yuri to finally read a manga with me. Like, I dunno why she was so finicky about it. I didn’t mind reading a novel with her, or whatever…”

Hayasaka: (“I suppose manga does have that mixed reputation, hm? Especially considering the more… *vulgar* ones.”)

Natsuki: “I just wish I could fix this dumb stereotype…”

Hayasaka: “Do you not have any friends who are also into manga?”

Natsuki: “N-No… All my friends made fun of me for it, so I can only rely on internet friends to talk about it with… But, that can only do so much, can’t it?”

Hayasaka: (“That’s a shame to hear… But it’s not like I can do much about it myself. Unless…”) “Ah, well, I don’t mind getting into manga for you, that is, if I have enough time to read it and all…”

Natsuki: “H-Huh? Really…? Would you really do such a thing, for me?”

Hayasaka: “...P-Perhaps, if it’ll at least give you someone to feel less alone about it.”

Natsuki quietly nodded. Then, she perked up as if a flicker of confidence caught alight inside her.

Natsuki: “Well, in that case, we should totally read a manga together next time! Since you promised and all, you can’t back out! Or else you’ll look like an idiot!”

Hayasaka: “I-I guess I would, wouldn’t I? Haha…”

After a while, the two left for their separate ways. Hayasaka opted to occupy himself with a light stroll around the islands, until he stumbled into someone.

Latte: “Oof!”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, I’m sorry, Latte…! Huh…?”

Upon closer inspection, Hayasaka realised Latte appeared somewhat shaken, adjusting her slipping witch-hat with a timid hand.

Hayasaka: “A-Are you alright, Latte…?”

Latte: “Don’t worry about me – I’m fine. Well… Hah, I’m just a little upset with this new motive, is all. The hallucination I saw this morning has been replaying in my mind a lot.”

Hayasaka: (“Rather similar to me, huh?”) “I’m sorry to hear that… What if you did something to take your mind off of it?”

Latte: “Oh, that’s a good idea, Hayasaka! Maybe we could do something together?”

Hayasaka: “T-Together? Ah, I suppose I don’t mind.” (“With her lax nature, I assume she has something calming in mind, such as the cafe or shrine…”)

Latte: “Let’s say we hit up the arcade! How about it?”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? The… the *arcade* ? That’s, um, a little out of your range, isn’t it? H-Haha…”

Latte: “Nonsense! It’s never too late to feel young again!”

Hayasaka: (“We’re both not *that* old, surely…”)

Regardless of his bewilderment, Hayasaka allowed himself to be taken to the arcade by the now eager Latte. Browsing the vivid attractions, Hayasaka observed how Latte whipped her head around intently, umming and ahhing at the games they passed.

Hayasaka: “S-So, ah, do people back at your home play games like this often then?”

Latte: “Mhm! But it’s mainly the younger cookies who adore all kinds of games, especially arena battles.”

Hayasaka: ("I can only hope she means play-fighting…")

Latte: "Oh! How about this one?"

Latte had pointed towards a colourful attraction that turned out to be a dance game, hosting two dance pads underneath a large screen. Hayasaka was unsure whether it was the loud music echoing out the speakers or the energetic dancers displayed on the demo screen, but he felt himself stiffen up either way as he tugged at his collar.

Hayasaka: "T-That is, um, a rather fast-paced game, isn't it? I'm sure you wouldn't want to do something so active, h-haha…"

Latte: "I don't mind giving it a go! And *I'm* the one wearing the dress here, hehe."

Hayasaka: ("...It's not like I can simply refuse and walk away now, can I? Anyway, Latte wouldn't be the type to make fun of me if I screw up – *and I know I will* …") "...I-I suppose we could, if you wanted…"

Latte: "Great! It's always fun to try something new, isn't it?"

While Hayasaka didn't share the sentiment, he decided to not comment on it aloud. The two stepped up onto their respective pads, Latte picking out a song on the menu. Proceeding the countdown, the first round began.

Needless to say, it was extremely awkward for the both of them: Hayasaka only really moved his feet when it was necessary and Latte was still attempting to get to grips with the mechanics of the game. Despite that, a few more rounds passed, Hayasaka noticing out of the corner of his eye Latte beginning to enjoy the game to a greater degree than he was, starting to make up her own moves to the beat despite the fact they didn't earn her any points. In fact, her free-styling only made her fail, her on-screen character flailing and slipping at the incorrect inputs.

Hayasaka: "L-Latte… You're not, uh, following the moves…"

Latte: “Oh well! It’s much more fun to create my own style than to stick to the pre-made dance!”

Hayasaka: “ *That’s sort of the point of the game* …”

Latte: “Haha, you’re so funny! C’mon, try it out with me!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not so sure about that…”

Latte huffed playfully before taking his hands off of the metal bar and guided him into following her dances. Soon, the two were creating a strange accumulation of moves of what could only be described as ‘dad dancing’. What was more surprising however was how Hayasaka found it not to be all that bad: albeit still somewhat stilted compared to how lively Latte was.

Project DIVA
Arcade

Hayasaka: ("I wonder if Gin would enjoy my cringe-worthy dance skills if he were seeing this right now, haha…")

Soon, the round ended, the game flashing a large and disappointing 'failure' result in their efforts. And yet, all Latte did was let out a hearty giggle, leaning against the metal bar to catch her breath. Hayasaka couldn't help but let a genuine chuckle escape from him as well from the mix of the depressing result and the contagiousness of her laugh.

Hayasaka: "T-That was… Ah, that was just silly…"

Latte: "Don't think I didn't see you get into it at the end there! Haha…"

A few moments passed as Hayasaka calmed himself down, glancing over at Latte only to falter at her distant complexion. Instead of her cheery demeanour mere moments ago, she was now staring blankly into the dance pad below.

Hayasaka: "Latte… I-Is everything alright?"

Latte: "...I haven't had this much fun on the island since I was with Mai."

Hayasaka paused, mouth slightly ajar at her solemn words. From his lack of response, Latte continued on.

Latte: "This just… felt so similar. Even when the group were upset or in a fight, Mai would always wear a smile and invite me out somewhere just to see me happy again…"

Latte then choked back a sob as she wiped her oncoming tears.

Latte: "I-I've never… met anyone who cared so much about seeing me smile… *sniff* …"

Hayasaka felt his hands tremble, barely being able to nod.

Hayasaka: “...I… felt the same way about her.”

Latte peered over at Hayasaka.

Latte: “Oh, dear, I’m so sorry. I feel so guilty for talking about Mai so fondly like this when I hardly knew her compared to you…”

Hayasaka: “N-No, it’s… It’s okay. I’ve never been that good with expressing myself too openly anyway, h-haha…”

Latte: “...Well, you deserve to grieve for her as long as you need. You don’t have to hide your feelings behind closed doors, okay? If you ever need someone to talk to about Mai, then you always have me and Kurumada to come to – we’ll always be there for you.”

Latte then moved to embrace Hayasaka in a small hug, which he attempted to reciprocate for her sake. Breaking away, Latte gave him a light pat on his arm.

Hayasaka: “Ah, t-thank you, Latte. I had fun here today…”

Latte: “Aw, it’s no problem at all, dear! We should do this another time, perhaps with more friends, huh?”

Hayasaka: (“I’m unsure how comfortable I’ll be with that, but… Seeing Latte’s smile, I can’t help but feel warmer on the inside… She really is trying her hardest for Mai despite everything.”)

The two then browsed the other attractions to wind down from their previous talk, before parting ways for the remainder of the day. Before Hayasaka knew it, however, time had geared towards 8P.M., and he began to make his way towards the hotel.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I wonder what Kurumada has planned this time… Seeing it’s usually something rather relaxing, it’d be nice to finally have a sit-down today, haha…”)

???: “Help! Somebody…!”

Hayasaka’s thoughts were put on hold as he abruptly picked up on frantic footsteps on the path getting closer and closer. Whipping his head around, he caught sight of a familiar girl dashing down the path – swiftly changing her direction towards him and practically halting on her heels as she sputtered on her breath.

Natsuki: “Hayasaka! Please! Y-You’ve gotta help me!”

Hayasaka: “N-Natsuki? What’s wrong?”

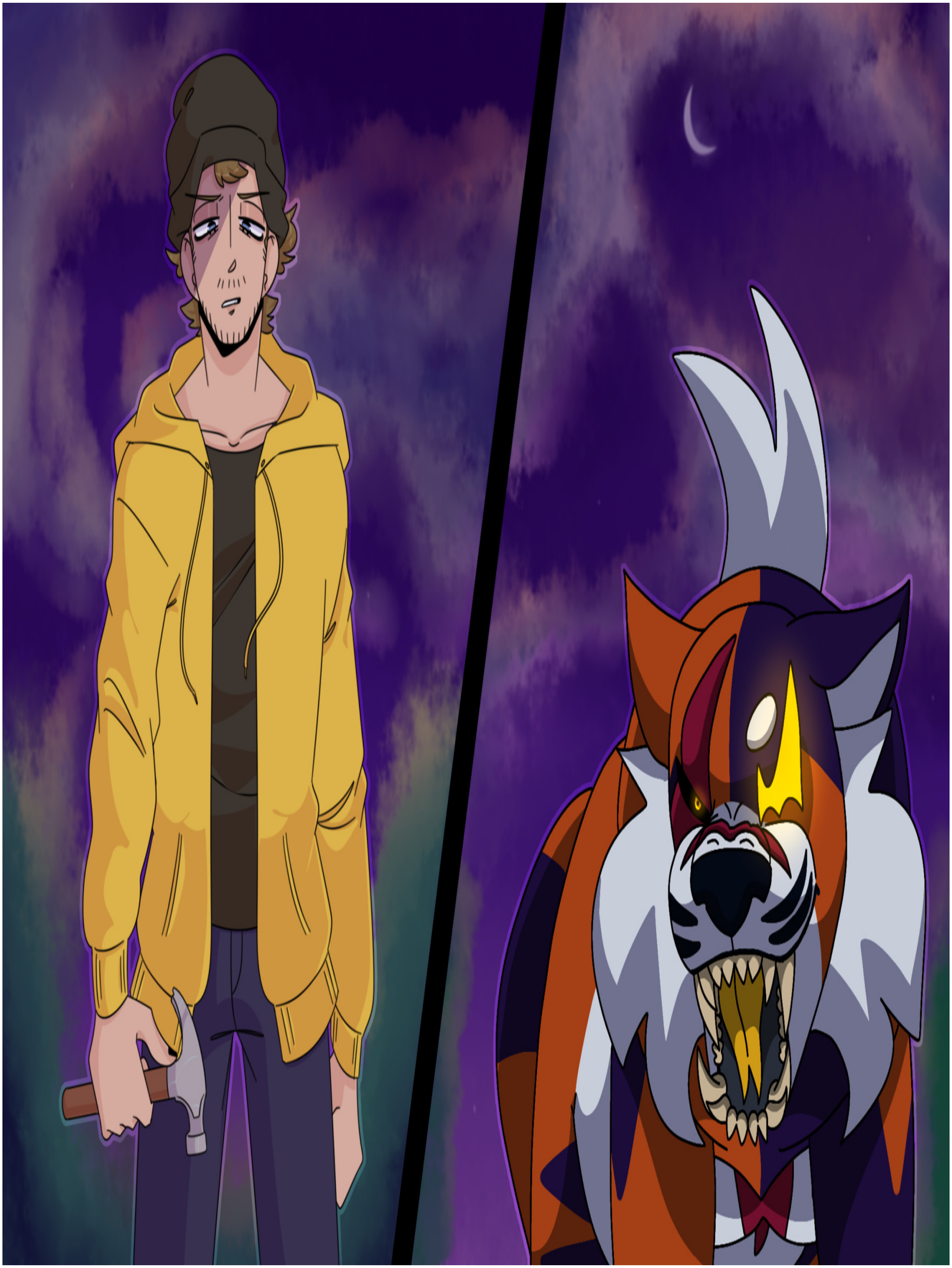
Natsuki: “I-It’s Jesse! He’s–He’s in danger!”

Hayasaka: “ *Jesse* ? Hold on – w-what’s going on?”

Natsuki: “Jesse and Bojack got into a fight while I was hanging out with them earlier. I tried talking to Jesse about it to try and convince him to make up with Bojack, but he got distant and walked off without me. So then I went looking for him – and I found him at the park with Monotora. He was holding a weapon – I-I don’t know what – and shouting at them. But I don’t–I-I don’t know what he’s doing and I’m scared–!”

Hayasaka: (“ *Monotora?* Oh god. *Oh god* .”) “S-Show me where he is…!”

Not another word had to be uttered for Natsuki to spring back up as she hurriedly led Hayasaka towards the park, his stomach churning with unease. Unfortunately as they arrived, she was exactly correct: there Jesse was, standing motionless in the middle of the park with a face that reflected nothing. His deep blue eyes were vacant, lips turned in a slight frown. In his right hand gripped a hammer, and directly opposite him was Monotora, tail rapidly swishing as their eye glinted with malice.



Hayasaka: “J-Jesse! What’re you doing?!”

Jesse: “ *Leave me alone, yo. This ain’t none of your business* .”

Jesse’s voice was barely above a whisper. Turning to look Monotora directly in their eye, he raised to a taunting shout.

Jesse: “Hey, asshole! I ain’t afraid of you, y’hear me? I’m gonna beat the *shit* outta you for all you’ve done to us!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! What? Is that really your threat of the century here? You’ll hardly be able to make your first move before bein’ ripped to fuckin’ pieces!”

Jesse: “Gh… *Bitch* .”

Monotora growled, claws digging into the cobblestone with a screech.

Monotora: “ *You asked for it.* ”

Before Hayasaka had the time to process what was about to occur, Monotora had sprung into a pounce. And yet, as he glanced over at Jesse, he froze.

CLANK

Loosening his fingers, Jesse had let the hammer slip out of his grip.

He didn’t move a muscle.

And yet Monotora was charging closer.

Hayasaka: ("*Jesse* …?")

Thousands of thoughts piled upon millions more in Hayasaka's brain – so many that he couldn't process any of them at all. Jesse didn't have a weapon. Without a weapon, he was going to get injured. He was going to get hurt.

He was going to die .

SLASH

Jesse: "*Argh–* !"

Natsuki: "JESSE–!!"

Not a second passed by before Monotora had swung down on Jesse's leg, dealing a nasty gnash into his flesh beyond his jeans, blood gushing out like a crack in a dam as he went tumbling down onto the hard cobblestone ground. Both Hayasaka and Natsuki were too paralysed in fear to move. Hayasaka could barely feel his own body anymore; he was just an overseer to the bloodshed.

Natsuki: "Pick up the *fucking* hammer and fight back you *dumbass* !"

Despite Natsuki's wild screams, Jesse simply rolled his eyes over to the two.

Jesse: "Heh… *It doesn't matter anymore.* "

A vacant smile plastered along his dry lips.

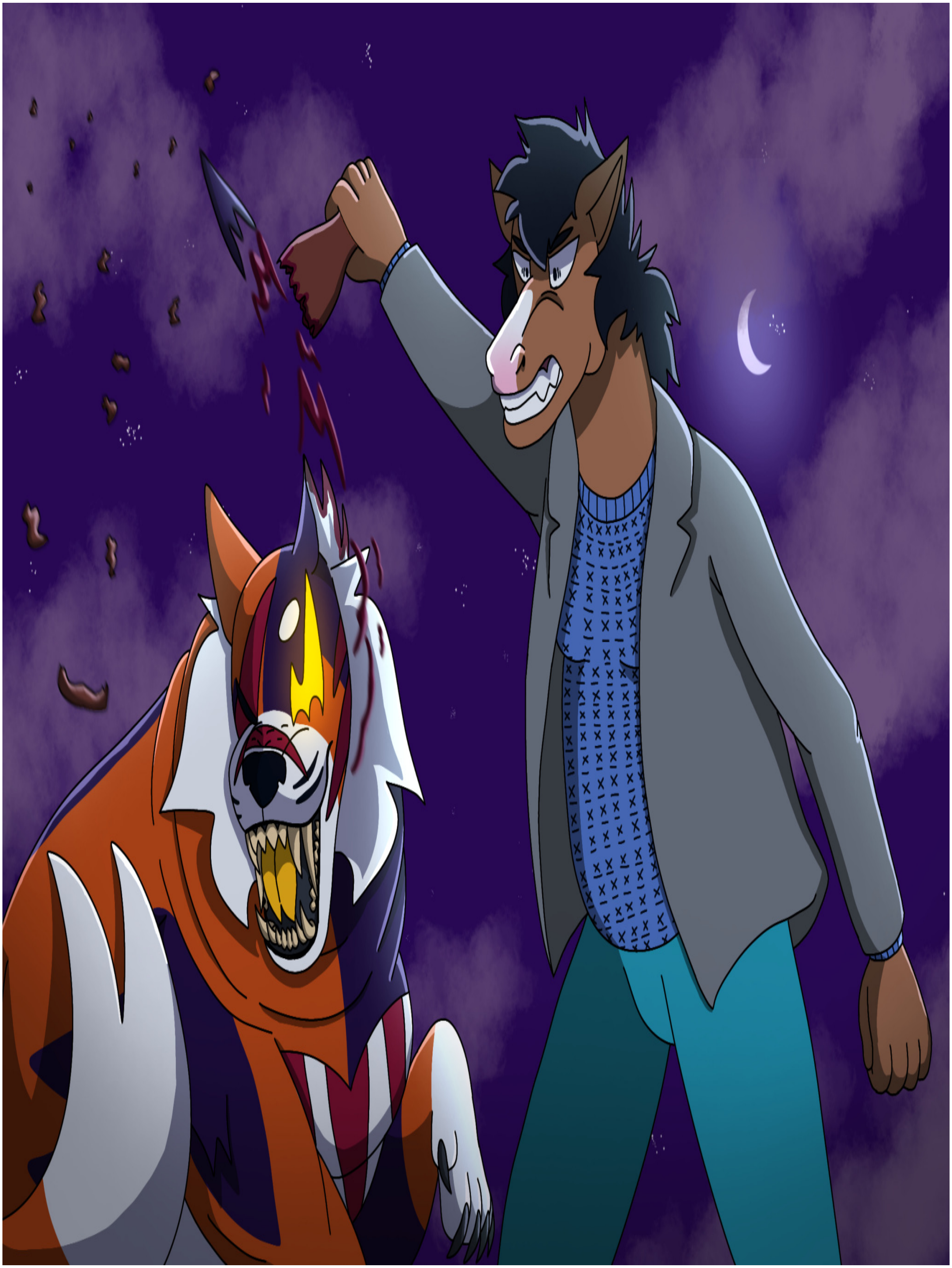
Jesse: "*Nothing matters anymore* ."

Hayasaka almost screamed when Monotora jumped up for the second attack.

Almost .

???: “GAH!”

SMASH



Monotora: “Argh– *fuck* ! Fucking– *Damnit* !”

Broken glass went flying everywhere. All at once, a bottle was smashed over Monotora’s head, causing their mechanical body to jolt unnaturally as they stumbled off. Mouth widened in shock and astonishment, Jesse’s eyes peered upwards until he saw the perpetrator of the act.

Jesse: “ *Bojack* ?”

Bojack matched Jesse’s gaze, eyebrows creasing as his grip on the head of the now smashed beer bottle tightened.

Bojack: “Just what the *hell* do you think you’re doing?”

Before Jesse could answer, Monotora had proven they weren’t finished yet, slashing at Bojack’s arm and sending more deep red gushing out onto the ground.

Bojack: “ *Shit–* !”

Monotora: “ *Grah* ! You RUINED my fun, you damn horse!”

Hayasaka watched as an instant switch flicked on within Jesse, eyes fiery as he jumped up with the hammer he had originally abandoned and swung fiercely at Monotora. The mechanical beast just barely managed to dodge the attack, gnawing their teeth.

Monotora: “Gah! Goddamnit! You–You *worthless bunch’a meatbags* ! You haven’t seen the end of this, y’hear me?! I haven’t got time to deal with you all anymore! Now get lost!”

Blood dripped violently from Monotora’s large claws as they turned and dashed off into the trees, leaving the four alone in the now silent park. Jesse and Bojack were left panting out sharp breaths from the adrenaline cool-down, while Hayasaka could only wonder how he hadn’t collapsed onto his knees yet.

Hayasaka: (“That was… No, what was that? *What was that* ? That was… insane. Truly… insane.”)

Natsuki: “J-Jesse…! Bojack…!”

Able to pick herself out of her frozen state, Natsuki had sped over to the two injured individuals.

Natsuki: “Oh my god – are you two okay?!”

Jesse: “I’m–I’m fine…”

Bojack: “I’ve seen better days, but this isn’t the worst of them.”

Hayasaka: “Y-You must be joking – either of you hardly look okay…!”

Hayasaka heard himself shout, finally holding a grip onto his senses again. The two glanced at him in astoundment as he took a step forward.

Hayasaka: “You’re both badly injured in one place or another, for Christ’s sake! Y-You both need to get treated as soon as possible so your wounds don’t get infected. Look… you can explain yourselves all you want once you’re bandaged up, alright?”

Thoroughly intimidated, Jesse and Bojack nodded. The wounded were guided to the pharmacy by the aid of Hayasaka and Natsuki, where the former got to quick work with what he could to bandage them up. Natsuki lingered worriedly a few ways behind them, the squeak of her shoes echoing in Hayasaka’s ears as she shuffled in place. However, he tried his best to focus as he finished wrapping a cloth bandage around Jesse’s leg. Deeming his job as decent as possible, he moved back to give them some space.

Hayasaka: “...Hah. T-There. If you rest well and take it easy for the time being with a few re-bandages, you should be okay.”

Softening his look, he turned to Jesse.

Hayasaka: “Jesse… Just what were you doing back there?”

Jesse kept his gaze glued to the floor. Closing his eyes, he let out a heavy exhale.

Jesse: “I…I dunno, man… I don’t know what the hell I was thinkin’ back then… It just started after some petty argument. Bojack pissed me off, I bounced, and then suddenly I was face to face with m–...another hallucination thing. But what it was sayin’ – it got to me. How I was weak. Pathetic. How I was better off gone from you guys. That I was weighin’ you all down.”

Bojack: “And you thought the best course of action was to let the tiger take you down?”

Jesse: “...I thought it would’a been the easiest way. Y’know, no complicated shit. Just… provoke the thing that wants to kill us. But–I don’t know. I wasn’t thinkin’ straight at all.”

Hayasaka: “So then, if it wasn’t for Bojack, you’d be–... Ah…”

Hayasaka stopped himself mid-sentence, but he could tell the damage had been done. However, Jesse simply nodded, running a hand down his arm.

Bojack: “...Todd–”

Jesse: “How did you know?”

Bojack: “What…?”

Jesse: “How did you know I was there at the park?”

Bojack: “...I didn’t know. Not exactly. I just… uh, I just went looking for you. And I heard a commotion at the park. Once I saw what was going on, well, you know how things played out from there.”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “... *Christ* . You’re an idiot for doing that. Why were you even thinking like that in the first place? That’s not like you to feel that way about your own life. That’s not you at all.”

Bojack’s slightly aggressive tone had Jesse stunned to silence. Quietly, he dragged his knees up to his chest, clenching his teeth at the movement on his wound.

Jesse: “*... I’m sorry* .”

Bojack stared at Jesse for a moment, before sighing.

Bojack: “...No.”

Jesse: “No…?”

Bojack: “I’m… I should be the one apologising here. This whole thing is my fault. I was stubborn– no, I was an *asshole* for making you walk off and experience that hallucination. If anything, you should be the one getting mad at me.”

Jesse: “You think I’m not? But, what’s the point of bein’ mad at each other now?”

Bojack: “...There isn’t one.”

Hayasaka’s lips remained sealed, feeling out of place in their intimately strained moment. He watched as Jesse glanced up at Bojack.

Jesse: “...I won’t… I won’t do somethin’ like that again. I promise.”

Bojack: “I’m glad to hear that, Todd 2. No, that’s not your name. I shouldn’t be comparing you to someone else anymore. You’re your own person with your own strengths and flaws. I can see that now. What should I call you instead? Aaron, maybe?”

Jesse shook his head with a small smile.

Jesse: “Just Jesse is fine.”

Bojack returned the smile.

Bojack: “Alright, Jesse.”

Hayasaka: (“To think how far these two have come over the past few weeks, I feel intruding seeing it so close myself, haha… It’s a friendship I may never truly understand. But, in a way, I’m… happy for them.”)

Bojack: “So are you just going to stand there and watch us like we’re in the third act of a sitcom or something?”

Hayasaka flinched at the sudden question, until he realised it wasn’t directed at him. Turning his head around, he noticed Natsuki tense up at the newfound attention, cheeks dusting red in embarrassment.

Natsuki: “Um… W-Well…”

Jesse: “You don’t gotta stand there. Come over here.”

Natsuki bit her tongue, digging her heel into the floor. Then, she quietly trotted over and sat on her knees beside Jesse.

Natsuki: “Are you… sure you’re not going to do something like that again?”

Jesse: “I swear, I ain’t.”

Natsuki: “...Good. You’d be selfish for dying.”

At that, Jesse let out a strained chuckle.

Jesse: “Sorry for scarin’ you back there, Nat.”

Natsuki: “N-Nat?”

Jesse: “S’just a nickname. You don’t like it?”

Natsuki: “N-No, it’s fine. It’s just… Why?”

Jesse: “Why what?”

Natsuki: “Why? *Why* ? Why’re you all being so nice to me? Why are you letting me hang out with you? Why are you giving me manga? I don’t deserve this treatment. You know I’m a *murderer* .”

Hayasaka: “Natsuki…”

It was then when Hayasaka caught Jesse and Bojack share a solemn look between them before the latter nodded.

Bojack: “...Because you’re not the only person here who’s killed someone.”

Natsuki: “Wh… H-Huh?”

Hayasaka: “W-What was that…?”

Bojack: “Sara Lynn. My co-star on Horsin’ Around, and more importantly my friend. I let her die of a drug overdose during a bender from my own personal bullshit problems. I let her die knowing I had all the means to prevent it from happening. No one knew it was me. No one still knows it was me. But I know what I did.”

Natsuki: “T-Thats… but you…”

Jesse: “It ain’t just him. Me n’ Mr. White have faced fuck tons’a casualties while we’ve been workin’ together. I’ve watched people die – maybe not innocent – but if it weren’t for us they still would’a been alive. I even had to dispose of a guy I knew in acid just to hide his body. It’s hard to not think about it sometimes.”

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“J… *Jesus* …”)

Jesse: “Sorry for, uh, dumpin’ that onto you. But if anythin’, Nat, what you did here was harmless compared to what we’ve done in the real world.”

Bojack: “We’re fucked up people. And we have no right to treat ourselves any better than you.”

Stunned at such an answer, Natsuki idly crumpled her skirt between her fists.

Natsuki: “...Why’re you telling me this?”

Bojack: “Because after hearing what we’ve been through, maybe it’ll give you closure on how you feel towards your own murder.”

Hayasaka: ("It's a bit… heavy to disclose such morbid stories to a young girl like that, but… Natsuki appears deep in thought about it. I suppose the three have more in common than I thought…")

Natsuki raised her head to the two beside her.

Natsuki: "...Thank you."

Jesse: "Ain't no need to thank us. You gotta get through it in your own way. Speakin' of which, weren't you gonna tell us about your manga earlier?"

Natsuki: "Again? No way. I told you – you're gonna find it weird."

Jesse: "Weirder than what Bojack's told us about his cameos?"

Bojack: "OK, firstly, Jesse, my cameos aren't *weird* . Felicity Huffman's Booty Academy was a one time thing and I made it very clear that I had no idea what I was getting into when I agreed to it."

Natsuki: "Pft–!"

Natsuki failed to hold back her giggle as the conversation shifted into a back and forth between odd stories from the three. Hayasaka listened on in content as time passed by.

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “It is now 12A.M., and so the nighttime routine thingy will start. This'll also mean that I'll be roaming around the island, so you better not be out in the dark until 7A.M. Otherwise I'm turning you into a chew toy.”

Bojack: “God, have we been sat here for *that* long?”

Jesse: “Guess we have.”

Natsuki: “We should probably go now anyway. My knees feel like they’re gonna cramp if I sit like this any longer.”

Hayasaka: “A-And it’s best we don’t get caught by Monotora, haha…”

Bojack: “That is also a valid reason.”

Attempting to stand up on aching legs, the four ventured discretely back to the hotel. After making sure his impromptu patients were fine getting back to their rooms on their own, Hayasaka finally slipped into his own room and practically flopped down onto his bed.

Hayasaka: (“That… was a long night, haha… I don’t know where to even begin with what happened today. I’d rather not reminisce on it too much at all for my own sanity. Still… the fact I was able to learn those things about Jesse and Bojack is… strange. Perhaps they didn’t mind that I was there because I had aided them? Or, did they just want a means to let off their guilty consciences? In any case, it’s made me realise once again that I truly don’t know these people at all to the full extent, even if I have spent quite a while with them. And as frightening as that is, it’s better I get some rest now…”)

Closing his eyes, Hayasaka drifted off to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

???#1: “God, smells horrible in here… Ah, that’s it. Eating so late? Did he hold off from feeding you or something?”

Monotora: “...”

???#1: “I’m talking to you, fatass.”

Monotora: “ *...Grr* .”

???#1: “Surprised to see me so late? Heheh, consider this a special visit. Don’t let your little caretaker pal hear this, but I have a couple of… extra experiments we got to run on you. Let’s say we take a little walk to my office, eh?”

Monotora: “...No.”

???#1: “Huh? C’mon, it’s way more comfier up there than this jungle shithole.”

Monotora: “You think I’m stupid?”

???#1: “...What’s that now? Haha, ‘course not. You’re a highly intelligent beast after all–”

THUMP

???#1: “ *Argh* –! Fuck! What the hell do you think you’re doing?! Throwing bones at your boss? You think it’s funny to act so damn immature? Can’t you act professional for once in your miserable life?”

Dokuhana: *Squeak squeak* !

Monotora: “Oi, I told you to stay behind me.”

???#1: “Oh, *I see* .”

Monotora: “...?”

???#1: “It’s sad, really You’ve lost your spark. You’re meant to be a beautiful killing machine! What happened to that power? That adrenaline? Now you’ve… you’ve become *soft* . And it’s all because of her! She was only ever supposed to motivate you to push the limits. How you’ve found any comfort in nothing but metal is beyond me.”

Monotora: “...”

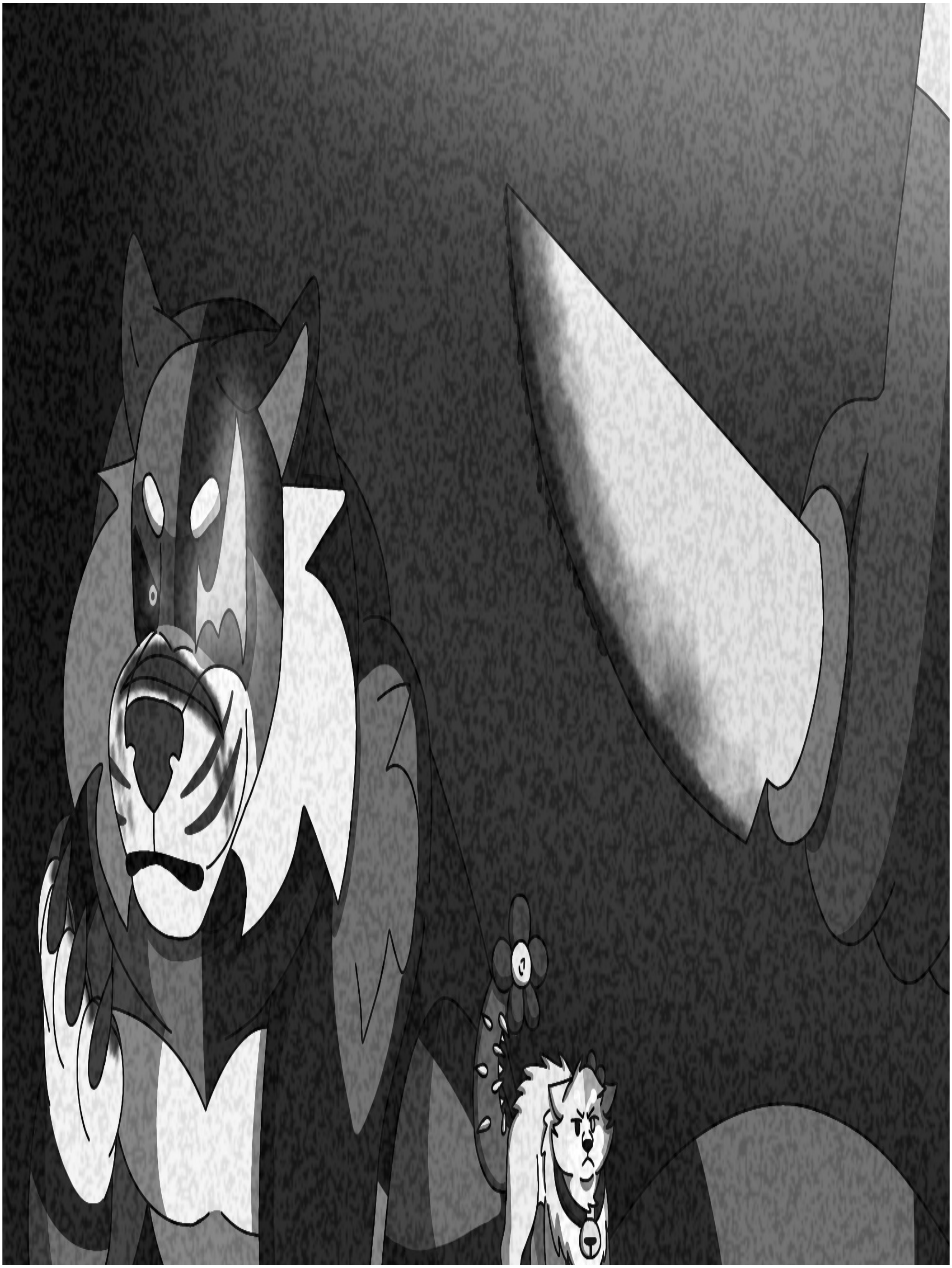
???#1: “But you don’t have to worry about that. After all, you’re just a machine. They fail all the time. I’ll be the one to fix you.”

Monotora: “ *No* .”

???#1: “No? *No?!* Is *no* all you can fucking say? She changed you – I know she did! Y’know what– screw that! I should’ve never bothered making another one in the first place! You work best alone. Yeah, that’s right – we should just keep you confined for the foreseeable future. I bet that’d jog your memory of the *animal* you’re meant to be. C’mon, kitty, down to the scrap yard you go–”

Monotora: “DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE TOUCH HANA–!”

SLASH



???#1: “ *Huff… Huff* … Surely that’ll cut some sense into you. Damnit. You think *I’m* stupid? I’m not going to walk around empty handed around you. I’m going to get through to you soon. You’ll see. You’ll see–”

???#2: “Hey! W-What the hell is going on?!”

???#1: “Oh… Eh, nothing but a lil’ board meeting. I was just leaving, anyway.”

???#2: “What the…? Oh god, Tora. Do you… want me to check that?”

Monotora: “...Leave me alone.”

???#2: “...”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Following his usual morning routine, Hayasaka had begun to spy certain things here and there in his peripheral that appeared off – upon turning to look at them directly however would always render him with nothing but a blank corner of his room. Apart from this, a distant thought began bugging his mind. It was something he couldn’t quite place a finger on. Had he forgotten something recently?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Maybe he had.

Startled by the unexpectedly aggressive knocking on his door, he paced over to answer it, grip remained on the handle as a precautionary measure. As he peered up at his visitor, his heart sank.

It was Kurumada. And he looked *pissed* .

And at that moment everything came back to Hayasaka.

The restaurant. He was going to meet Kurumada at the restaurant last night.

And he never did.

Hayasaka: "...K-Kuru–"

Kurumada: "What the hell, Hayasaka? Am I some kinda joke to ya? I didn't take ya for a guy to stand people up. I waited in the restaurant for an hour, and ya never showed. So what the fuck gives?"

Completely off guard by the sudden hostile tone Kurumada had adopted seemingly out of nowhere, Hayasaka took a step back to give himself some space.

Hayasaka: "I-I–I'm so sorry, Kurumada. I completely forgot about it because I was–"

Kurumada: "You *forgot* ? So now I ain't important to ya, is that it?"

Kurumada practically spat out his words, backing Hayasaka into his room unwillingly as the violent glint in his eye became more prominent. Hayasaka couldn't remember the last time such bitter behaviour from the other was directed at him, so much so that he felt himself tremble slightly.

Kurumada: "So what? Tell me – do ya think I'm an idiot? Or do you hate the things I've done for ya? Or–Or you just don't like me the way I–"

Hayasaka: " *Someone almost died!* "

Kurumada: "What–"

Hayasaka: “Jesse was attacked by Monotora–a-and he almost died–and Bojack saved him–but they both got wounded–because Jesse was trying to kill himself–from a hallucination–and I had to tend to their wounds–or else they would’ve gotten infected–and I never wanted this to happen and I’m truly sorry for never showing up…!”

Hayasaka left himself in a mess of short, bated breaths as he attempted to regain his composure. Peeking through his lenses, he watched as Kurumada paused to decipher his frantic outburst. Eventually, his once frustrated face dropped to a blank, staring the other with a much softer look.

Kurumada: “...That really happened?”

Hayasaka nodded.

Kurumada: “... *Shit* . God, Hayasaka, I didn’t–fuck, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were caught up in that. I just started overreactin’ thinking you–damnit…”

Kurumada hung his head.

Kurumada: “I’m a fuckin’ idiot.”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, no, Kurumada, it’s okay. If anything, it’s my fault for not at least telling you what happened last night…”

Kurumada looked back up at Hayasaka with a creased brow.

Kurumada: “Hey, don’t say that. I just barged in here, scaring you half to death, and you think this on you?”

Hayasaka: “Well, that is…”

Hayasaka’s eyes fell to the floor. Kurumada had a point – why was he apologising? A soft creaking shot his attention to his bed, where Kurumada had taken a heavy seat on the edge.

Kurumada: “...Are you alright? From last night, I mean.”

Hayasaka: “Ah? Um, yes.”

Kurumada: “You didn’t get hurt?”

Hayasaka: “Thankfully not.”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: “...Kuru–”

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. What do you think of me?”

Hayasaka: “P-Pardon?”

Kurumada: “I know it’s a ‘prolly a weird question right now, but the answer don’t gotta be deep or nothin’. I just wanna know.”

Hayasaka: “Is this about what you were saying earlier?”

Kurumada: “Look, uh, I was just havin’ some bad thoughts, y’know? I think those hallucination things were buggin’ me.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada… You know we’ve been friends for quite a while. There’s never been a time I’ve ever thought ill of you.”

Kurumada: “‘Cept when I pick fights?”

A teasing grin flashed on Kurumada’s lips. Hayasaka shook his head with a brisk chuckle.

Hayasaka: “Those don’t count.”

Dragging his foot along the carpet in thought, Hayasaka loosely folded his arms.

Hayasaka: “May I ask a question now?”

Kurumada: “What’s up?”

Hayasaka: “...These things you keep inviting me to. What do you see them as?”

Kurumada’s face drew to a blank.

Kurumada: “Uh… bro-time?”

Hayasaka raised a brow.

Kurumada: “...Yeah, not that.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, you don’t need to… You don’t need to feel obligated to ask me out to places. I like spending time with you as we are now.”

Hayasaka felt his cheeks heat up as his eyes drifted to the floor.

Kurumada: “Heh, uh… Damn. Wish I realised that sooner. I hate goin’ on dates, anyway.”

Hayasaka shot his eyes back to him. Kurumada matched his wide-eyed look.

Kurumada: “Uh–shit, I didn’t mean to say…”

Hayasaka: “Say what? Did I miss something?”

Hayasaka’s faux-naive expression caused Kurumada to sigh as he ran a hand through his hair.

Kurumada: “You fuckin’ saint…”

Heaving himself off of the bed, Kurumada stepped closer to Hayasaka.

Kurumada: “So, does that mean you… y’know…?”

Taking a deep breath, Hayasaka opened his mouth.

But no words came out.

Despite Kurumada’s warm smile, Hayasaka couldn’t seem to muster a response. His once witty-confidence had been overcome all too quickly, shutting down the fluffy air and forcing him back into the grim reality. He didn’t understand why. Everything was fine. What did he have to lose?

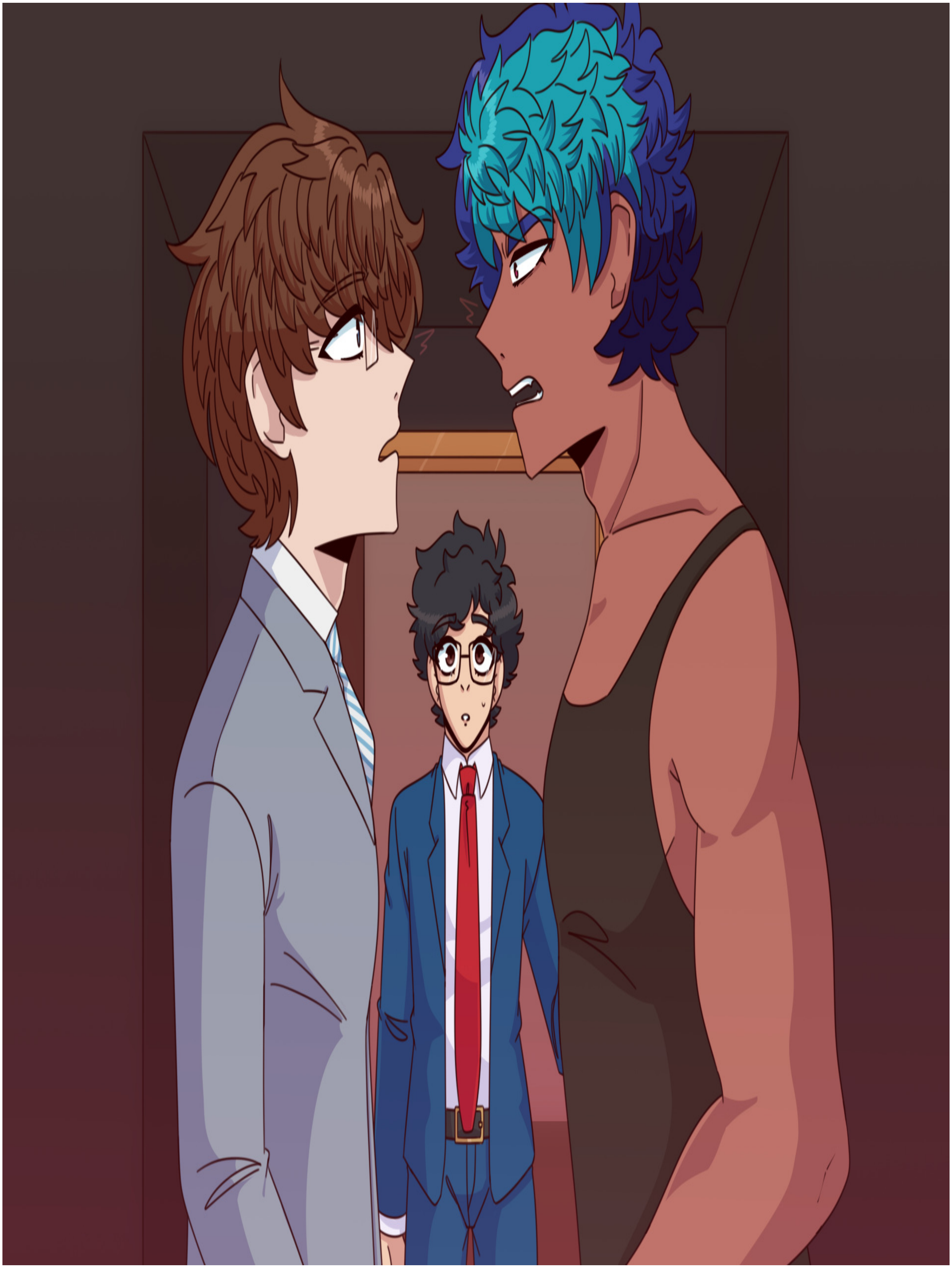
Hayasaka: “Ah, w-well…”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “I…”

???: “Hey, Hayasaka– *huh* ?”

Instinctively, the two shot their attention to the open doorway to spot none other than Brian, who was glancing between them with a raised brow. Relief washed over Hayasaka, but he was unsure why.



Brian: “Erm, sorry, am I interrupting something?”

Kurumada: “Ya should’ve knocked first, dumbass!”

Brian: “But the door’s wide open…”

Kurumada: “... *Shit* –still, ya should’ve just waited somewhere else!”

Brian: “I-I’m sorry?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, it’s alright, Brian. We–...We were about to leave for the restaurant regardless.”

Kurumada: “...Yeah. What the hell did ya even want from Hayasaka, anyway?”

Brian: “Oh, well, I was just wondering if he’d like to come and have a coffee with me since I’ve been feeling a little sick from all the hallucination business.”

Hayasaka: “That would be nice, haha…”

Hayasaka peered over at Kurumada to gauge his response, and he gave a curt nod.

Hayasaka: (“...Kurumada doesn’t seem to be mad, at least.”)

Following the awkward encounter, the three travelled downstairs to the restaurant. Hayasaka offered to find them a table as the others went to brew the drinks. Scanning around, Hayasaka caught sight of Jesse, Bojack and Natsuki eating breakfast together. From how upbeat the three were, it would’ve been difficult to tell the life-threatening situation they had been through just the previous night.

Hayasaka: ("Even Natsuki seems much brighter than the past few days before… Perhaps they truly had bonded over the conversation they had last night…")

Tearing his eyes away, Hayasaka spied another individual, this one sat by her lonesome sipping away at her usual drink.

Hayasaka: ("...I remember how Latte would always sit with Mai in the mornings. From what she told me yesterday, it doesn't feel right seeing her sitting on her own. Perhaps…")

Hesitantly making his way over to her, the other peered up as she bore an idle smile.

Latte: "Hayasaka, good morning dear."

Hayasaka: "Good morning, Latte. I was just wondering… Would you mind if Kurumada, Brian and I sat here with you?"

Latte almost appeared taken off guard for a moment, before she perked up. With a giggle, she tilted her head with an even wider smile.

Latte: "Aw, I'd love to! That's so nice of you to suggest that."

Hayasaka: "Ah, i-it's nothing, really. You're our friend after all, aren't you?"

As Kurumada and Brian returned back out, they joined the two at the now more populated table and dabbled in light conversation.

Latte: "We've never really talked too much, have we Brian? You're a witch hunter, right?"

Brian: "Kind of? I mean, I don't know if you could really see it as a profession."

Latte: “Then you must know about what they do, right? Why do they want to eat their creations so badly? I think they should be appreciating the life they made.”

Brian: “Yeah that’s–w-wait what…?”

Kurumada: “Bwaha – witches ain’t real, anyway.”

Brian & Latte: “They are!”

Kurumada: “What the–? Where’d the duo-shit come from?!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, haha…”

Breakfast continued on as peacefully as it could while the group attempted to ignore whatever figure or shadow was lurking in the corners of their vision.

Hayasaka: (“...I’m still a bit worried Kurumada was expecting something from me earlier. He actually seems content as of now, so perhaps I’m okay? I… I don’t particularly want to think about it too much. Let’s just, ah, focus on something else. How about I go find someone to talk to?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Jesse at the arcade.

Jesse: “Kinda craving a smoke right now…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Jesse? Would you like to hang out again?”

Jesse: “Oh shit, Mr. Hayasaka! Let’s chat, yo.”

Hayasaka spent some time with Jesse. Unsure if it would come across as an insult or not, Hayasaka gifted Jesse a pack of menthol cigarettes.

Jesse: “...I mean, a cigarette’s a cigarette. Ain’t it?”

Hayasaka: “Probably…?” (“Regardless, I think he liked it. So that’s good, haha…”) “So, Jesse, I hope I don’t come across as rude, but are you a heavy smoker…?”

Jesse: “Mm, I guess. It ain’t the only shit I’m smokin’, if ya know what I’m sayin’, heheh.”

Hayasaka: “What… exactly else do you take?”

Jesse: “Fuck… are you gonna scold me? God, now you just sound like my mom.”

Hayasaka: (“His… mother? He couldn’t have compared me to his father?”) “N-No, I can’t help but be concerned for your health due to my medical knowledge, but… I really am just curious.”

Jesse: “If you say so… Yeah, so, I’ve smoked my fair share of weed n’ meth.”

Hayasaka: (“Meth?! That’s quite…”) “...And why would you want to partake in such substance abuse?”

Jesse: “Look, I just… You probably wouldn’t understand what I’ve had to deal with. I grew up with my parents not thinkin’ much of me. I just screwed up all the time, unlike my brother, Jake, who like wins a bunch of rewards n’ shit. My folks gush about him all the damn time. Sometimes I bet they tell people he’s their only son.”

Hayasaka: “Oh…”

Jesse: “School was just as bad. Wasn’t very good at it. But my teachers didn’t respect me. Instead of like, asking ‘hey, d’ya want any help’, they’d just ignore me. Mr. White kinda did that, but he wasn’t the worst. I respect him for that. And on top of the stress of takin’ care of my aunt with cancer, I guess the only thing that gave me some sorta escape from it all was… drugs.”

Hayasaka: “Your aunt has cancer…?”

Jesse: “Heh, my aunt Ginny was probably one of the only people who cared about me, y’know? ‘Side from my friends, of course.”

Hayasaka: “ *Was* ?”

Jesse: “She’s… she’s dead.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry. I didn’t realise that she was already…”

Jesse: “No, it’s alright, yo. You didn’t know…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, alright…” (“And yet, Jesse appears a little upset still. Jeeze, why was I so careless? I hope I didn’t make him mad with me…”)

Jesse: “Still, I got to keep livin’ in her house, until my folks kicked me out.”

Hayasaka: “Oh, where do you live now?”

Jesse: “This sweet lil’ apartment. It’s kinda bare right now, but I plan to add better shit — a flat screen and some Asian-styled stuff. Uh, that ain’t offensive, is it?”

Hayasaka: “No, I don’t think it is? Haha…”

Jesse: “Cool. I’ll totally send some pictures or whatever when it’s done if you want.”

Hayasaka: (“Does he think I’m interested? I mean, I suppose I don’t mind…”)

The two then parted ways after a little while. As the day was still fresh, Hayasaka seeked out someone else to talk to.

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Latte at the shrine.

Latte: “How bothersome: it’s so hot, and yet I have no other clothes I could change into…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Latte. Would you like to talk some more?”

Latte: “I would love to! Come, I’ll go grab us a latte like last time.”

Hayasaka spent some time with Latte. Hoping she’d like the gesture, he gifted her a spell book.

Latte: “Now won’t you look at this… I could learn a thing or two from this! Did you know that even teachers aren’t exempt from enriching themselves?”

Hayasaka: “Haha, I suppose that’s true. I just assumed you’d like it considering the magic teachings you mentioned previously.”

Latte: “How thoughtful of you – you’re such a diligent listener!”

Hayasaka: (“I’m happy she likes it.”)

Latte: “I’m so glad to see you’ve come back, Hayasaka. You’re just like an eager student ready for class!”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m unsure if I’d call myself that: work life has just made me a punctual man, whether I like it or not, haha…”

Latte: “Oh, speaking of students, there’s one that’s stuck out to me recently. Her name is Cream Puff Cookie.”

Hayasaka: (“And now she’s gone into a ramble of her own. I’m just relieved she’s taken control of the conversation…”)

Latte: “Cream Puff is a student I met during a mix-up at the Parfaidia Library. The next day I found out she was a new student of mine, and when she asked if I could give her some extra tips on her magic, I was more than excited to see the spell she was working on. Unfortunately, she hadn’t exactly perfected her spell all that well, and ended up summoning a red velvet cake dragon that went on to terrorise the city.”

Hayasaka: “G-Goodness…” (“Are all monsters in Earthbread made out of some sort of confectionery or something?”)

Latte: “Cream Puff and I, along with a detective known as Almond Cookie, trekked to light the beacons to defeat the dragon. Almond was very stubborn at first: police can be so rude sometimes, don’t you think? I’m sure a latte would soften him up.”

Hayasaka: (“I’m not sure if that’s the solution to the problem…”)

Latte: “He did eventually come around and help us out in the end. Hehe, his outfit sort of reminds me of yours.”

Hayasaka: (“Do I really want to be compared to a stubborn detective?”) “I must say, Latte, you seem to be quite the loyal and caring professor.”

Latte: “You really think so? I don’t believe I can prove such a fact until you see it for yourself.”

Hayasaka: “What do you mean…?”

Latte: “Next time, I’ll teach you how to summon a glyph. It’ll be such a breeze!”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t know… Could I really do something like that?”

Latte: “Don’t worry! I’m an expert. You won’t go wrong under my teachings!”

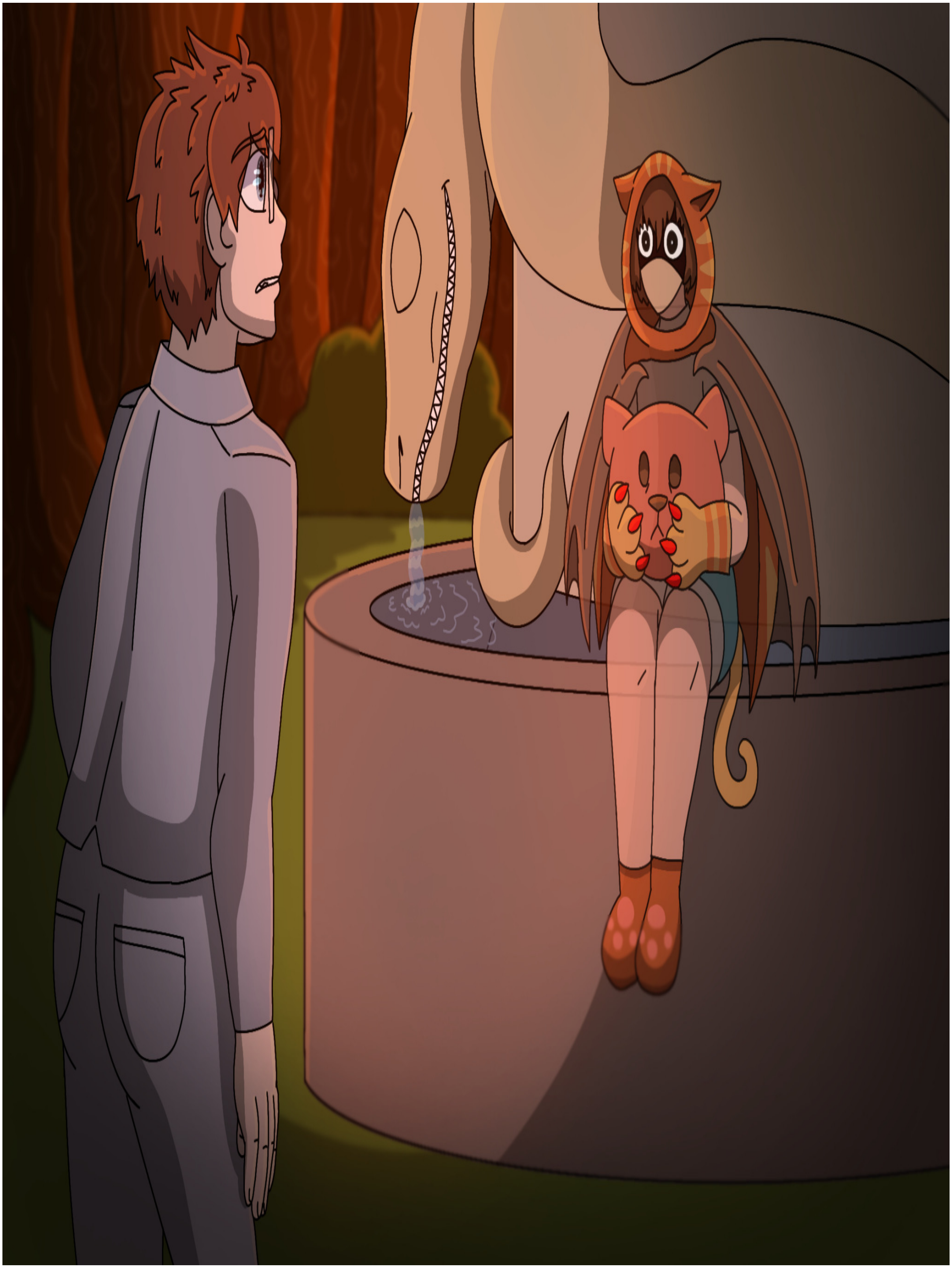
Hayasaka: “If you really insist upon it then… We’ll have to see.”

The two then parted ways after a short while.

…

It felt like hours before Hayasaka had even noticed the sun begin to set. Anything and everything in his vision seemed twisted or warped in some way, reaching the point where it had become difficult to determine what was real and what was simply a byproduct of this sick program infecting his very consciousness. The constant back and forth made him fatigued much earlier than he’d usually be at such a time, and he just wanted to call it a night already. Trudging back to the hotel, Hayasaka’s attention was caught by a figure up ahead sitting on the fountain’s edge in the park. This made him pause for a moment, and as a wave of curiosity struck him, he rerouted himself into walking towards the figure.

As the person came into better sight, however, Hayasaka could only cease to move out of pure disbelief.



Hayasaka: (“ *Gin* …?”)

Although his legs were swinging innocently over the fountain’s edge, the boy was unnaturally stiff, his pupils so dark and large that they absorbed any white from his eyes – so dark and large that Hayasaka couldn’t look away from them even if he tried. Anywhere else he looked he saw Gin staring into his very soul, picking apart the thoughts in his mind. Hayasaka attempted to blink, again and again and again, but Gin would be there every time he opened his eyes. This was supposed to be some petty hallucination right? Then, why wasn’t it going away?

Gin?: “ *Suit n’ Specs … When will you be home, meow* ?”

Hayasaka: “H…Huh? What are–what are you talking about…?”

Gin?: “ *I’ve been waiting, you know? I’ve been waiting so long for you to come back and take me to a safe home, woof* .”

Hayasaka: “Waiting…?”

Cautiously, his hand brushed past his pocket where that letter sat. Of course he knew what Gin meant. Of course he could never forget the situation Gin was in right now while he was trapped on this island. It sat in his thoughts daily, even if he sometimes never faced it head on.

Hayasaka: “Ah… I can’t… I can’t come back right now, Gin. B-But… I will. Very soon, we’ll all find a way off this island, and then we can–”

Gin?: “ *Then why didn’t you just take the boat when you had the chance, meow?* ”

Hayasaka: “What…? No, it–it was destroyed, remember? It was burnt by Hiroshi when he…”

Gin?: “ *That’s not an excuse, woof. You shouldn’t have been so depressing and useless. If you really cared about me, then you would’ve built another boat, meow* .”

Faltering, Hayasaka tried to speak, but the words wouldn't form. Gin at this point had stopped kicking his legs, eyes still intent on the other.

Gin?: " *I guess I'll have to wait for someone else to take me home instead, woof. Even if they hit me, or call me names…* "

Hayasaka: "N-No, that won't happen…! I promise you I'll be there to take care of you, Gin–!"

Gin?: " *But then why aren't you here now, meow* ?"

Hayasaka: "I…"

Gin then giggled, but not a muscle moved in his body. His shoulders didn't shake, his eyes didn't crinkle, and yet it rang out so deafening in Hayasaka's ears.

Gin?: " *I don't understand, Suit n' Specs. You've let so many people die. That's not very fair. They had lives too, you know. Do you like that? Do you like seeing people die? Are they not important? Are you going to let more die? You can say you were just trying to save yourself, but that just makes you selfish. That just makes you weak. I'm surprised you've lasted so long here, being as selfish and weak as you are.* "

Hayasaka: ("Nn…No… S-Stop it…!")

Hunching in on himself, Hayasaka plugged his ears with the palms of his hands, fingers gripping onto loose strands of hair as he tried to block out what Gin was saying with all his will power. But it was no use: he could still clearly hear Gin's voice invade his mind.

Gin?: " *You should just give up, meow. You'd be doing everyone a favour that way.* "

Hayasaka: "G-Give up…?"

Hayasaka's voice was barely audible as he echoed back Gin's words. A strange sensation arose in his chest at the thought – something warm yet freezing his body into a cold sweat all at once. Bewildered with himself, he took a step back, feeling himself push back against a vigorous force. Twisting his head around, he saw Mai, the same Mai who woke him up just the previous morning. As if he wasn't meant to be looking at her, she had instantly grabbed his shoulders, her touch prickly and cold. She hushed him, turning his body around to the path behind them.

Hayasaka tread with heavy steps as he was guided back towards the hotel by Mai. His mind was at a blank, thoughts blanketed in a fuzzy static that disconnected his moving legs from his own violation. It was like he was watching himself in the third person, viewing this other him from behind a screen. Before he knew it, he had found himself in the kitchen, looming over a particular counter. Hand sliding down to encompass his pale hand, Mai directed him into retrieving a large knife from the knife rack – presumably the largest one available. Hayasaka was enticed by how it glistened in the dimness of the room, as if it emitted its own glow. As if they were meant to have grabbed it.

Beside his ear, he heard Mai chuckle.

Mai?: " *Hehehe… Do you like it, Hayasaka? This was the knife I used to kill Yuri. It's so clean now, despite how bloody I got it beforehand.* "

Hayasaka heard himself hum under his breath.

Mai?: " *…Why didn't you stop me from leaving the hotel back then, Hayasaka? Why did you feel as if condemning me to death was more important than our friendship, Hayasaka?* "

Hayasaka: "I… I'm sorry…"

Both hands now enveloping the knife, Mai went to stroke his cheek.

Mai?: " *It's too late now for apologies, I'm afraid. Especially with your words. Those nasty words caused me to die, didn't they? And yet, you can't even use them properly anywhere else. If you truly wish to prove yourself sorry, then you'll have to use your actions, won't you?* "

Mai took his hands so that the knife now lined up perfectly with his neck. The end of the blade was mere centimetres away from his skin: one waver closer and it’d pierce his flesh with ease.

Mai?: “ *One quick stab should do the trick. I’ll forgive you from the afterlife then.* ”

Hayasaka was shaking. And yet that same sensation arose again, bringing a sense of comfort to his nerves. With his last remaining strength that lingered on, he parted his dry lips.

Hayasaka: “W-What… What will the others think… of me… doing this…?”

Mai?: “ *Hahaha… They’ll all look down at your lifeless body and shake their heads, calling you such a weak, useless man who only knew how to let others die – even dirtying the floor with his pathetic blood.* ”

Letting a pained laugh escape his upturned lips, Hayasaka’s vision blurred with something wet.

Hayasaka: “ *Y-Yes… I suppose you’re right…* ”

What was this feeling? He couldn’t quite describe it. It was new. It irked him. And yet, he didn’t mind it at all.

Well, it wouldn’t matter soon.

Maybe this was all right.

SWOOSH

Hayasaka: “ *H-Haah* …?”

CLANK

Hayasaka blinked. And then blinked again. His hands were still directly facing his neck, but what they were encasing was no longer there. Eyes trailing down to the kitchen tiles, he noticed the knife now laying beside his loafers. He dropped his arms slowly back down to his sides. He couldn't feel the ghostly hands snaking around him anymore. Just someone a good few metres away. Turning around, he saw them in the dark room.

It was Saiki.

The pinkette's eyes were wide – wider than he'd ever witnessed before – and his hand stuck far out as if he'd just knocked the knife out of his hands himself.

What?

But that would've been impossible, wouldn't it?

Still coming to grips with reality again, Hayasaka attempted to piece together everything that happened in that split second while lucid. Staring at the boy with a creased brow, he held his own hand out.

Hayasaka: "Saiki… Did you just…?"

But Hayasaka didn't know what Saiki just did, if he had even done anything at all. Instead, he watched as the other furrowed his own brows as his gaze dipped towards the floor.

Saiki: " *It was the only way I could've stopped you in time from hurting yourself.* "

Hayasaka: "H…Huh? Saiki, what're you talking about…?"

Saiki: " *No, I'm asking the questions first. What were you trying to do right now?* "

Just like that, fragments of what just occurred pelted Hayasaka like bullets. *Gin, Mai, the knife, the new feeling that grabbed at him so suddenly, making him do something so, so wrong* .

His body froze, horrified with what he was about to commit upon himself. He wanted to fall down, hit the floor, cry out in terror – but he couldn't. Not with Saiki standing there, demanding an answer out of him. All he could do to ease some of the stress off was to let out a shaky breath.

Hayasaka: "I-I… I don't know, honestly. It–The hallucinations – they got the best of me. And I… I don't know, Saiki. I just–..."

Hayasaka sucked in a breath.

Hayasaka: ("Even though I felt as if I was being directed by Mai all that time… Deep down, it was me who walked to the kitchen and picked up that knife, wasn't it…?")

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "...If–god–if you hadn't come when you did, I would've…"

I would've stabbed myself, or at least bled out , is what Hayasaka wanted to say, but his voice refrained him from doing so. All he could do was stand there in silence.

Eventually, Saiki nodded.

Saiki: " *...I'm glad I decided to follow you from the park when I noticed you were talking to no one* ."

Hayasaka: ("He… He saw all of that…?")

Saiki: " *Clearly, it's not best for you to be alone right now. I'll go find Kurumada so you can–* "

Hayasaka: " *No* –!"

The cry left Hayasaka before he realised, causing Saiki to return a confused look.

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, w-what I meant to say was… Please don’t tell him. I don’t… We don’t need people worrying more than they should, right?”

Saiki’s gaze was like a vulture, seizing Hayasaka’s nervous completion in the dark room. Somehow, it was more grating than when he had a literal knife pressed up against his neck.

Saiki: “ *...Fine. But how can I know you’re never going to do that again* ?”

The boy’s stern tone should’ve intimidated Hayasaka, but all it did was make him feel ashamed. Pursing his lip, he looked the other in the eye.

Hayasaka: “...I promise I won’t. Even if it somehow happens again, I’ll… I’ll remember this. I’ll remember you saving me. And then, I’ll find somebody, somebody real. Please, Saiki…”

Holding eye-contact just for a little longer than Hayasaka could appreciate, Saiki tore his eyes away with a light sigh.

Saiki: “ *...Okay.* ”

Hayasaka: “...Um, can I ask you something now then, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *What is it?* ”

Hayasaka: “What… What did *you* do just now?”

The question hung in the air as Saiki ceased to respond. The two stood in the heavy air for a moment, and then a moment longer, before Saiki took a step forward closer to Hayasaka. As he went to open his mouth, however, he shook his head, doubling down and retracting whatever he was going to say.

Saiki: " *I'll tell you later. When I get the courage to* ."

Hayasaka: ("What could Saiki possibly be afraid of…? Ah, as if I could be asking such a close-minded question this far into everything…") "I understand. You've already done enough for me here."

He noticed Saiki look him up and down for a moment, briskly nodding once more.

DING DONG BING BONG

As the nighttime announcement rang out as it usually did, Hayasaka dropped his shoulders.

Hayasaka: "...I suppose we should head back to our rooms, huh? I can walk you there if you'd like."

The boy hummed a noise of affirmation, as the two slowly made their way to their hotel rooms. Although Hayasaka was supposed to be walking Saiki, it felt as if it were the other way around. Even as they reached their doors, Saiki paused, shooting the other a look as if to say 'are you sure you're going to be okay on your own.'

Hayasaka: "I'll be alright, Saiki."

With not much else he could do, Saiki turned away and retired into his room. Hayasaka lingered there for a while, until he left for his own room.

The minute Hayasaka was close enough to the bed, he collapsed down onto it, glasses uncomfortably squashed against the pillow and his head. He rolled over onto his back, covering his face with his hands and attempted to shake off all the remaining thoughts over the last hour or so.

Hayasaka: ("This isn't like me at all. I don't know what's happening anymore. Was this just some sick attempt of the motive trying to kill me? Or was this something else…? It really felt like Gin was talking to me. It really felt like Mai was walking me to the kitchen and guiding me towards the–... Ah, christ…")

Slipping his glasses off, Hayasaka stared up at the ceiling.

Hayasaka: (" *Did I really almost die…* ?")

But Hayasaka didn't want to dwell on the thought. It made him feel empty, it made his body spike in diluted pain. It felt almost comedic how out of everyone to save him, it was the person who would never make such a big deal from it. And yet even Saiki seemed just as angry and concerned as anyone else would be.

Hayasaka: ("...I don't want to think about it anymore. No, I just… want it all to go away…")

That's all he told himself as he shut his eyes and forced himself to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

XX/XX/XX

01:08 AM

AUDIO SYSTEM: RECORDING

Monotora: "...They're gone for the night, try doing the thing you see 'em do and get that door open for us."

Dokuhana: *Squeak squeak!*

…

Dokuhana: *Squeak!*

Monotora: “Great job kid – now we can get outta here and look for that fucker who tried to take you away.”

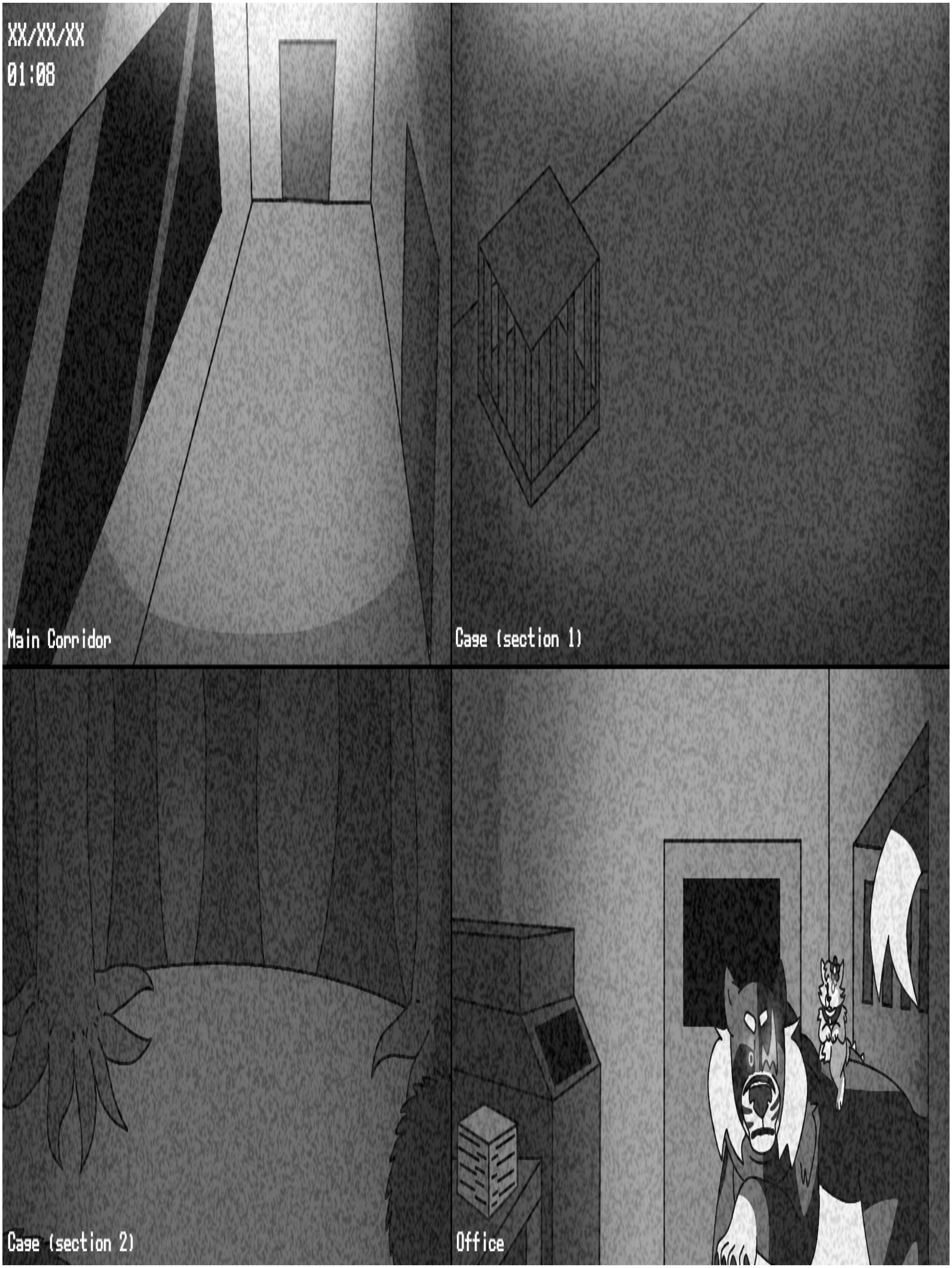
Dokuhana: *Squeak squeak squeak?*

Monotora: “The caretakers won’t know we went out, we’ll be back before they notice.”

Dokuhana: ... *Squeak?*

Monotora: “Eh? How? They always come back by around six in the morning. Besides, we got around five hours to go lookie around the place. I’ve memorised the boss’ scent and when we catch ‘em, I’m gonna rip ‘em apart like a chew toy!”

Dokuhana: *Squeak! Squeak!*

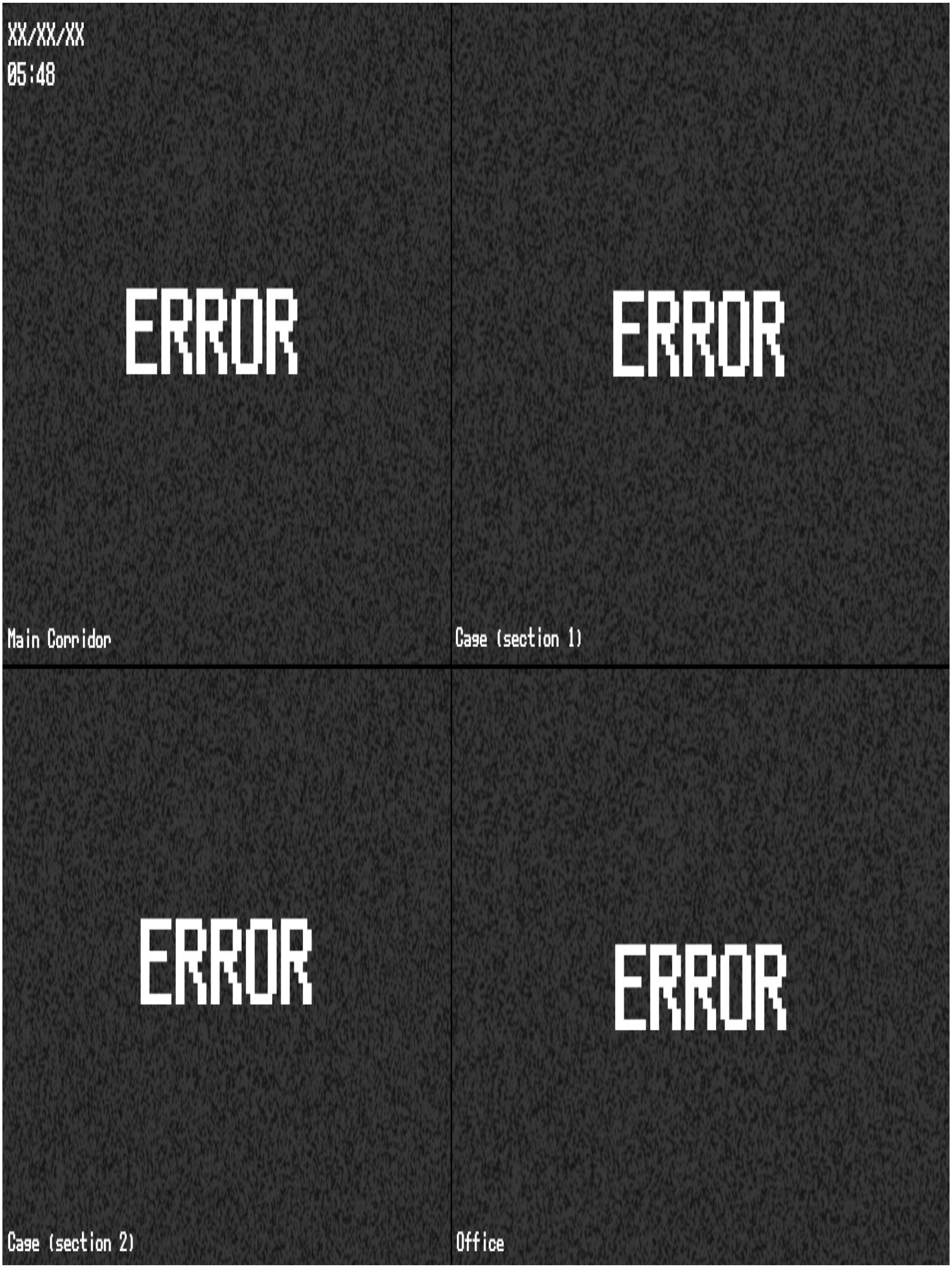

XX/XX/XX
01:08
Main Corridor
Cage (section 1)
Cage (section 2)
Office

…

XX/XX/XX

05:48 AM

ERROR: CAMERA SYSTEMS UNRESPONSIVE, AUDIO RECORDING UNRESPONSIVE


XX/XX/XX
05:48
ERROR
Main Corridor
ERROR
Case (section 1)
ERROR
Case (section 2)
ERROR
Office

...

DING DONG, BING BONG

The morning was silent. Apart from the usual ruffling of clothes and the sharp running of water, Hayasaka's room had been forced into a state of noiseless tasks. He didn't want to reflect back on yesterday, not even the parts he liked: any of it would just remind him of what had occurred mere hours ago. He just had to endure the tremors that arose in his hands as he went to button his blazer.

Arriving at the restaurant a little later, he idled in the kitchen doorway as he noticed someone already preoccupying the counter with the coffee machine. They turned their head, smiling softly at his appearance.

Brian: "Oh, good morning, Hayasaka."

Hayasaka simply nodded, feeling strained to produce words. Walking over to Brian, he noticed his expression shift to concern.

Brian: "This might sound weird, but when I first came into the kitchen earlier, I noticed a knife laying in the middle of the floor. I mean, I did put it away – seeing as it was clean – but, I wonder what it was doing there…"

A sharp surge of tension pulled at Hayasaka, a cold sweat overcoming him. He audibly gulped, trying to nod along as casually as possible.

Hayasaka: "That–That is weird…"

Brian: "...Hayasaka? Are you alright?"

Looking over, he realised Brian was staring at him with a creased brow.

Hayasaka: "Ah… I'm fine. Let's just get our coffees and go, haha…"

After what seemed like an uncomfortably long pause, Brian gave him a sympathetic nod. As the two walked back out into the restaurant with their drinks, he heard the other begin conversation again.

Brian: “Honestly… I feel a little less on edge today. It’s probably because I haven’t gotten a hallucination yet.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, now that you mention it, I haven’t either.”

As Hayasaka went to take a sip of his coffee, he faltered.

Hayasaka: (“I…I *haven’t* ?”)

L: “Is that correct?”

Hayasaka glanced over at L who had approached the two, Saiki a few ways behind intent on listening in.

Brian: “What do you mean?”

L: “Because that would mean all four of us are in the same situation.”

Hayasaka: (“Not them either…?”)

Just as Hayasaka noticed Kurumada enter the restaurant, he flagged him over.

Kurumada: “What’s up?”

Hayasaka: “Have you had a hallucination today yet, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Uh… Nope. Don’t think I have…”

Saiki: “ *It looks like all our hallucinations have stopped* .”

Hayasaka: (“No…”)

Brian: “Huh? W-What does that mean?”

L: “That means the condition for this motive has been met: the hallucinations were only set to last until a *murder* has been committed.”

Hayasaka: (“ *No* …”)

Almost instinctively, Hayasaka whipped his head in each direction around the restaurant.

Hayasaka: “T-The others aren’t here…” (“Jesse, Natsuki, Bojack, and Latte… Oh god…”)

Kurumada: “Shit…! Then what the hell’re we waitin’ for?! We gotta split up n’ look for ‘em!”

Brian: “W-Wait! I don’t think we need to look around – I already know somewhere that might be suspicious.”

Hayasaka: “Where?”

Brian: “The database – on the fourth island.”

Kurumada: “Eh? Why there?”

L: “No, I agree with Brian. In fact, I believe we should head there as soon as possible.”

Without wasting a single word, the five dropped everything and left the hotel, dashing over towards the fourth island. Arriving in the front of the database, Hayasaka planted his hand onto his knees as he panted under his breath, watching as Kurumada attempted to open the door, only to start struggling against the handle.

Kurumada: “Damnit – it won’t open!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?” (“But, the last time we tried it, it opened just fine… Is this what Brian had meant?”)

Kurumada: “Argh – screw it! I’m gonna break this fuckin’ door down myself!”

Brian: “W-What?! You can’t do that! You’d be breaking property!”

L: “We don’t have much of a choice, unfortunately. There must be a reason why the database is locked.”

Kurumada: “Stand clear, alright?”

The others took a step back as Kurumada seized the door, throwing the side of his body against it. This repeated a few times until the door bursted in, Hayasaka unable to pick up on a lock breaking, but otherwise something toppling over with a heavy thud. However with the rest of the group already rushing inside, he had no choice but to follow. Unsure where to search first, Hayasaka trailed down a row of servers, uncertain on who or what he was supposed to be keeping his eyes peeled for.

???: “G-Gah–!”

Snapping his head to the direction of the shout, Hayasaka picked himself back up into a dash, halting as he saw Brian, grip tight on his briefcase as he simply stood, staring at something past his view. Creeping closer, Hayasaka joined his gaze.

And then he locked up at the sight too.

Despite all the adrenaline pulsating through his veins just seconds before, everything in Hayasaka's body spiked to an almost painful blow. The mixture of today's emotions and yesterday's and all the days before blended into one, and yet he felt empty. So, so empty. Like willful ignorance being hit in the face with the cold reminder of the reality he lived in. Like his pains being overpowered by those he had seemingly pushed aside.

How could he forget he was in a death game?

…

[BDA]

…

Seeing *Bojack Horseman* lying limp against a server cabinet, a deep gnash eating into the side of his head, had surely reminded him he was never to forget that fact.

And to never forget that he was *dead* .

Chapter End Notes

is that. is that the. is that. the horse. from horsin aro- *gets shot point blank*

danganronpa fans when a bulky person dies irl: YO MUST BE CH4 (/lh)

(ok but death does not care about tropes death attacks when it wants to and today it chose to commit a horse plinko glue factory)

(if anything we can call it the animated adult show character dies in ch4 trope now)

I hoped you enjoyed this very mentally sane and normal chapter where everyone was completely fine and had a stable sense of mind *steps in front of Hayasaka so you cannot see him*

(also that vr world video was hella fun to make... oh speaking of the vr world... huh I wonder what that was all about... I'a wonder...)

Chapter 4: One's Reality is Another's Delusion (Deadly Life)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> holy shit we're back so soon this feels weird ain't there supposed to be a 3 month break or something
>
> also random thought time: so anyone here a Project Sekai fan? I've been playing it for a couple of months now and I love every single character they're so silly and billy (my top fave tho is Kanade hehehe) maybe you'll run into me during a co-op show who knows (it will be very unlikely but still)
>
> 8k words this time ("yes", you celebrate, eyes worn out, "a shorter chapter"). Let's get this show on da road and investigate bojangles death

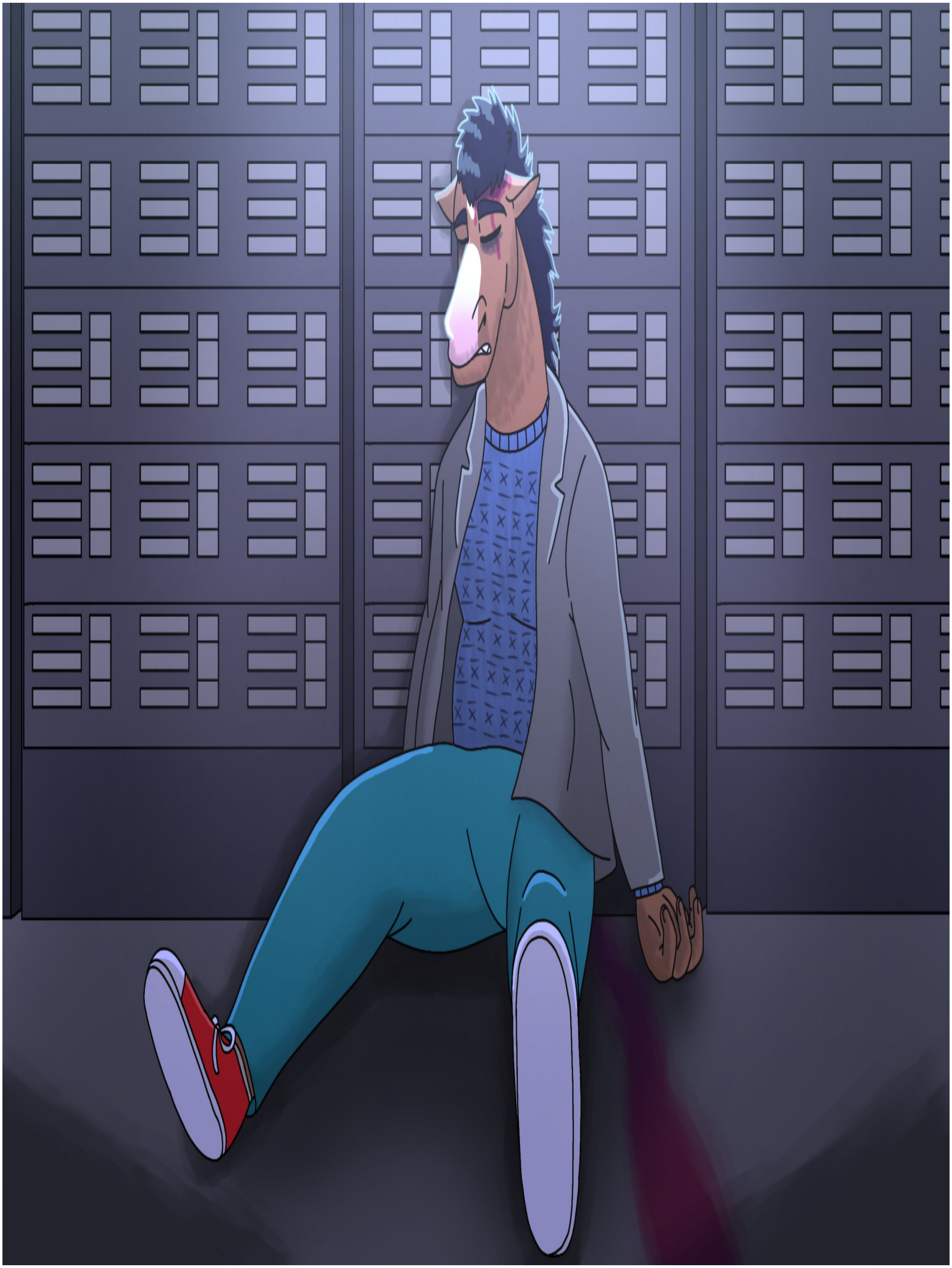
See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayasaka’s head had been overflowing with tricks, temptations and attempts to mess with his reality. Even if it was only for a few days, the hallucinations had gotten so real to the point he had found himself with a knife rammed up against his neck, and he himself the perpetrator. How absurd, how laughable, even.

And yet, this chance of a murder had never occurred to him. A murder, which took place only a few islands away – miles away – slipped his mind so easily. Although *he* didn’t die, it never crossed his mind that another life had been taken.

But as ridiculous and as stupid as it was, just one question had managed to surface to the forefront of his hazy mind.

Just who managed to kill someone as big as Bojack?



DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "Well would ya look at that, a fresh piece of prey has been found! Well to you fellas who haven't eaten a single human, it's just a dead body to you. As this event has been triggered, you all have a certain amount of time to gather up as much evidence as possible before the class trial! Make yer way to the database immediately, before I get a nibble on the body - it's tempting, not gonna lie, keheh..."

And there it was. But it wasn’t like Hayasaka even needed the confirmation anymore. Somehow, it was becoming easier to recognise the dead.

Kurumada: “W-Whoa… No fuckin’ way…”

L: “Well, this is certainly an intriguing sight to behold.”

Saiki: “...”

Brian: “But… But how?”

Kurumada: “Ya can say that again. Damnit.”

The sound of heels dashing inside the database tore Hayasaka’s attention off of the other’s gawks.

Latte: “Who’s–? Oh dear! Is that…?”

Quietly coming closer, Latte stared on with a strained look. Not long after, another pair of shoes could be heard hastily bounding in.

Natsuki: “ *S-Shit–!* N-No, what– What the–? Damnit, Natsuki, don’t throw up. D-Don’t throw up…”

After taking a deep breath, Natsuki clenched her fists.

Latte: “Natsuki… Do you need a moment, dear?”

Natsuki: “I… *God damnit* ! No–I-I’ll be fine. Just…”

At that moment, her eyes widened.

Natsuki: “Wait, damnit, where’s Jesse–”

Jesse: “What’s goin’ on?! Who died now?!”

Natsuki: “Hey! J-Jesse, don’t–!”

But it was too late. Before Natsuki could divert his attention by grabbing his arm, Jesse’s eyes were firmly locked onto Bojack. No matter how hard she tugged to force him to turn away, his body was as dense as iron. An unmoving statue, its hope shattered.

Natsuki: “Jesse…”

Jesse: “...Gh… *Nn* …”

His tears began to bubble up before long. And just like that – body practically tumbling onto the floor – Jesse’s voice rang out. His sobs were loud and heavy. His tears almost shone in the dark, desolate room. On his knees, he repeated a single word under his breath.

Jesse: “Why… W-Why… *hic* … WHY *?!”*

His voice wavered, slurring and slobbering as his tears became more unhinged. The sight was so familiar to Hayasaka; it was like looking into the past where Jesse had cried out for Walter not too long ago. Yet, this one felt more melancholic, more sombre. As if he didn't want to cry out again. God knows no one wanted him to.

Even if it was for Bojack.

Kurumada: "Hey…"

Hayasaka heard Kurumada whisper as his hand snaked onto his shoulder.

Kurumada: "You alright? Seein' another body so soon…"

Hayasaka nodded.

Hayasaka: "I-I'm okay."

Whether that was a lie or not anymore, Hayasaka didn't care. Leaning into Kurumada's touch, however, felt more comforting than letting his thoughts decide for him.

???: " *Hng, mmm, grrr…* "

Strange chewing noises caught everyone's focus as Monotora lumbered onto the scene, gnawing on a large bone in their mouth. Even if it was supposedly for their 'digestive system', Hayasaka only saw it as sick and unnecessary.

Monotora: "G'heheh, some strong deja vu here. Man, but what a mess this place's got."

L: "It's rather troublesome. However, it's hardly a dent in comparison to our new victim."

Hayasaka: ("I wonder if L is trying to be more sentimental than usual – out of everything he could've said, I suppose.")

Natsuki: “Ugh! If you have nothing important to say, then just screw off!”

Monotora: “Shut ya trap, ingrate! Y’know I’m only here to remind you about the damn Nesos file. It’s not like I wanna see Jesse’s breakdown: the sequel. That is, unless you really *don’t* want to figure out what happened to ol’ Bojack…”

Jesse: “We get it.”

Jesse dropped his head as he grit his teeth.

Jesse: “So leave us the *fuck* alone.”

Natsuki: “Jesse…!”

Monotora: “Not a big fan of the tone, yer junkie fuck.”

Before Hayasaka could blink, the bone in Monotora’s mouth was spat out into their paw, hurling it towards Jesse. As he held out his hand in reaction, someone else was much quicker to catch it.

Kurumada: “You’ve done ya damn job now.”

Monotora locked their dark eyes onto Kurumada, who tightened his grip on the bone. Huffing out an animalistic grunt, they spat onto the ground.

Monotora: “ *Bastards* .”

Heavy stomps resounded out as Monotora retreated from the database. Glancing down, Hayasaka caught his hands trembling.

Hayasaka: ("Why… Why has Monotora become so sour to us? The idea of them going rogue from Nesos' orders and attacking us could happen any moment with the way they're acting now… I really don't want that. At all.")

Following the tense scene, Latte took a short breath and stepped over to Jesse, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Latte: "Jesse, dear… What would you like us to do for Bojack?"

Picking his head up, Jesse stared straight at Bojack's body.

Jesse: " *...I'm sorry* ."

To Hayasaka's surprise, it was him who Jesse turned to next.

Jesse: "Mr. Hayasaka, could you, uh, could you lead the investigation for the murder, or–or whatever…?"

Hayasaka: "M…Me?"

Jesse: "'Cuz you just, y'know, you're good at this shit. How you looked over, like, everything for Mr. White, and even his body even though you ain't into that kinda stuff. I appreciate that, y'get me? And you told me everything so I didn't… Look, what I mean is, if it wasn't for you, I dunno, I guess I'd have a harder time comin' to terms with his death. I just want you to do the same for Bojack."

Hayasaka: "B-But, ah, it wasn't just me. If anything, L had a great deal in looking over his body as well…"

Jesse: "Yeah, but I just… I feel more comfortable with you doin' it. Please."

Hayasaka's throat became heavy. Rubbing his wrists, he stole a glance around at a few faces before giving into the pressure.

Hayasaka: "...Alright. I'll try my best."

Jesse shot him a nod and all Hayasaka could do was sigh as the weight from his shoulders was lifted ever so mildly.

Natsuki: "Hey, Jesse… You wanna go outside or something? I mean, not forever, b-but…"

Jesse: "Yeah. Let's, let's do that, Nat."

Natsuki: "M-Mm."

Helping Jesse up to his feet, the two left the database. Hayasaka was stunned for coherent thought. Just yesterday, the three were so happy when he last saw them in the restaurant. So happy when they all shared stories together in the pharmacy.

So, what went wrong?

Kurumada: "Huh. Looks like you're the new head honcho, eh? Heheh."

Hayasaka: "K-Kurumada, that… There was never really a 'head' to begin with."

L: "..."

Hayasaka: "Ah, L… A-Apologies for stealing your job. Jesse just wanted me to, well…"

L: "I'm not sure why you're even apologising. I was never upset to begin with. In fact, I find these circumstances rather humorous on my end."

Saiki: “ *And only your end.* ”

Hayasaka: “You can still do all the investigating you want. I won’t stop you.”

L: “That’s what I planned to do. Your word or not.”

Hayasaka: (“Ha… How scary. Or, perhaps just playful? It’s a little hard to tell.”)

Latte: “You guys really get into the role of detective well, don’t you? That means I’ve gotta really roll up my sleeves to try my best to help out.”

Brian: “Well, I guess it’s time to… do this, again.”

Hayasaka: “Actually, before we start, it’s probably best to have someone keep a close eye on Bojack’s body.”

Kurumada: “Go on then, I’ll be ya guard. After all, I’m ‘prolly most suitable to watch over a body as large as that guy. Or horse. Or whatever.”

It was almost unnerving how few words needed to be uttered before everyone spread out to their own investigative areas. Hayasaka never really knew the right time to move himself. Fortunately, someone else had already found their way over to him.

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka. Um…”

Hayasaka: “Is everything alright?”

Brian: “Ah, well, I was just wondering if… it would be okay if I helped out again? With your investigation, I mean. It’s just, I think I already know about something pretty suspicious to do with the database.”

Hayasaka: (“I do remember he was the one to propose we come here earlier…”) “Well, of course.”

Brian: “R-Really? It was a bit, um, y’know, since we already…”

Hayasaka: “Is there some sort of unspoken rule that we can't investigate together twice? Haha…”

Brian: “Ha, guess not. Just, with you being the head investigator now and all…”

Hayasaka: “I-I think everyone needs to take that idea less seriously…”

INVESTIGATION

Brian: “So, I guess the file first?”

Hayasaka: “Ah… yep.”

But before Hayasaka could even get a finger inside his pocket to retrieve his tablet, Brian put his hand out.

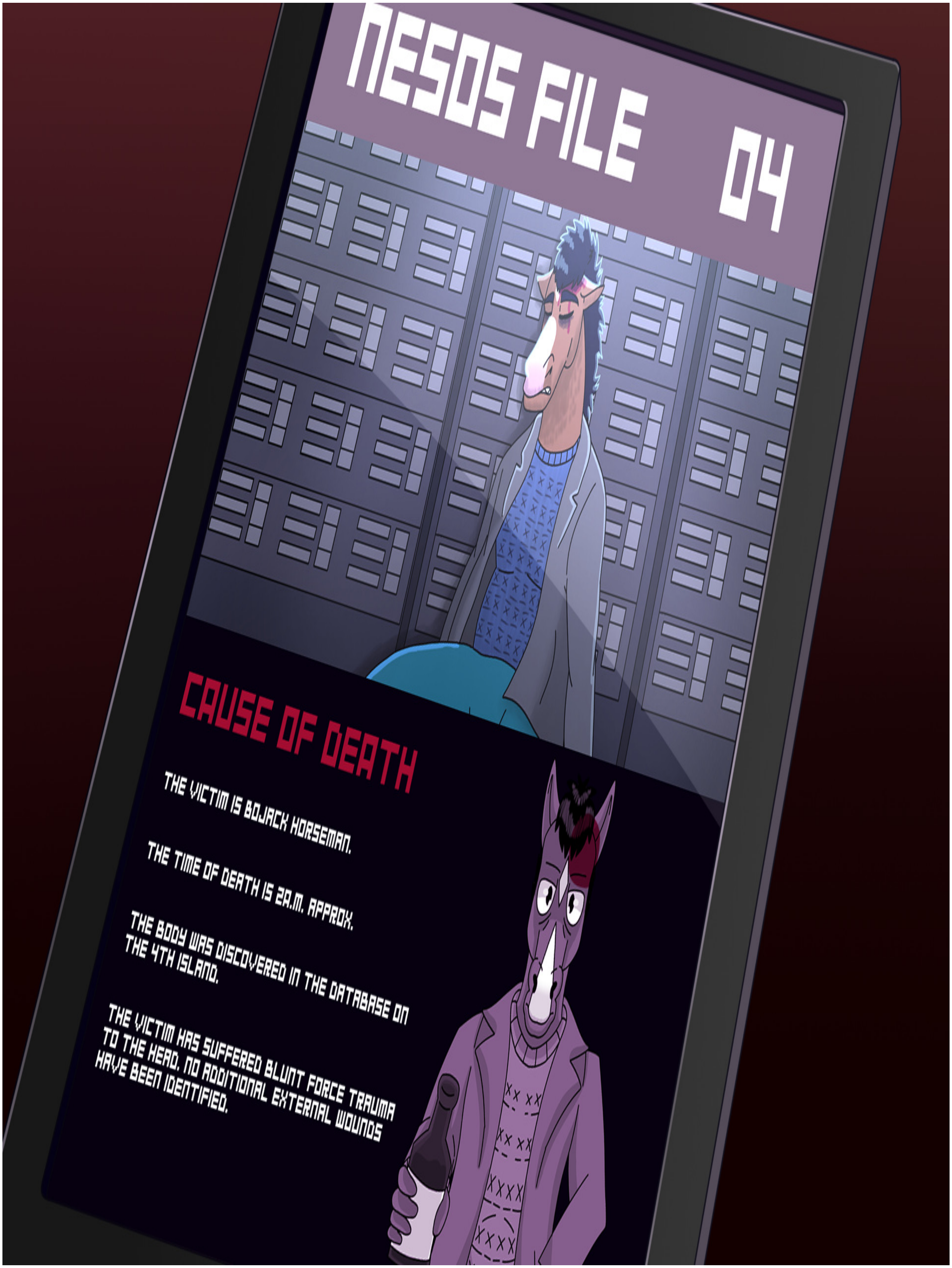
Brian: “Wait! I’ve got this.”

Hayasaka couldn’t help but raise a brow as Brian dived into his own pocket, tapping away on his tablet screen. Then, he turned so the two were facing the same direction, tablet screen displaying the file.

Brian: “I’ve been practising.”

Hayasaka: “...So you have.”

Something inside Hayasaka wanted to let out a chuckle, charmed by Brian’s oddly determined ways to get to grips with technology. If not for the corpse lying only a few ways away, that was. He had to admit, however, it was much better for his sanity to have at least something small to brighten the morbid situation.


MESOS FILE 04

CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS BOJACK HORSEMAN.

THE TIME OF DEATH IS 2A.M. APPROX.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN THE DATABASE ON THE 4TH ISLAND.

THE VICTIM HAS SUFFERED BLUNT FORCE TRAUMA TO THE HEAD. NO ADDITIONAL EXTERNAL WOUNDS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED.

The victim is Bojack Horseman. The time of death is 2A.M. approx. The body was discovered in the database on the 4th island. The victim has suffered blunt force trauma to the head. No additional external injuries have been identified.

Brian: “Hm…”

Hayasaka: “What is it?”

Brian: “Well, compared to the other files, nothing feels to be missing. In fact, a lot of the facts have been stated: the time, the cause of death…”

Hayasaka: “The cause of death?”

Brian: “Is that not what the ‘blunt force trauma’ part meant?”

Hayasaka: “I… I don’t know, actually.”

Brian: “...We’ll, uh, just put a pin in that then.”

Hayasaka: “Unfortunately, it seems a weapon hasn’t been listed. But…”

Hayasaka took a chaste glance around the general area of Bojack’s body.

Hayasaka: “...I can’t seem to find anything suitable that would’ve caused that blow to his head.”
(“But that’s why we’re here to look around, I suppose.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File 4

Hayasaka: “So, ah, Brian, what did you have to say about the case?”

Brian: “Well, you see… It’s not to do with Bojack – well not that I know of right now – but it’s definitely tied to the database.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Brian: “It’s kind of a long story, but… Last night, L and I went to the VR facility to see if we could find a way to potentially undo the effects of the hallucination program.”

Hayasaka: “You did what? But… wouldn’t that be something the whole investigation group would do together? Why weren't Saiki and I invited?”

Brian: “It was, uh, my idea actually. I thought it would be best for you, I mean, you were already suffering enough from the hallucinations on top of Mai’s death. You didn’t need any extra stress.”

Hayasaka: “Oh. Brian… T-That’s…”

Hayasaka gave Brian a soft look, causing him to rub the back of his neck.

Brian: “Ah, heheh. I-I was just looking out for you. We considered the same for Saiki, anyway. I don’t know how his state on Kaidou is, but it was better to be on the safe side.”

Hayasaka: “Wait, so, how does the database come into this then?”

Brian: “Oh yeah. So at one point, L asked me to get a file with some info on the VR facility from here.”

Hayasaka: “Did you recall the time at that point?”

Brian: “Um, I’m pretty certain it was coming to somewhere around 2A.M.”

Hayasaka: “Hang on – isn’t that the same time listed in the file for the time of death? Did you ever see Bojack when you arrived?”

Brian: “That’s the thing, I didn’t. But, when I started looking around the filing cabinets, all the lights in the building suddenly switched off, as well as whatever else was on at the time such as the servers and computer monitors.”

Hayasaka: “That’s… an unusual occurrence. Do you have any idea what caused that?”

Brian: “Ha… No clue. When I first arrived and turned on the lights at the entrance, everything was fine. To be honest, I was a bit used to the idea of faulty electricity from Sintracorp, so I assumed everything would be alright if I went to turn the lights back on. I mean, o-okay, I was a bit freaked out at the time, but when I was feeling my way back to the entrance, I heard *it* .”

Hayasaka: “Heard what?”

Brian: “A loud smashing sound. I had no idea what it was. Something breaking? A weapon? I don’t know. But it startled me so much I completely forgot about the file I was meant to be looking for and I kinda… booked it out of there.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Brian… Well, I can’t blame him. I imagine myself doing the same. Then again, just what was that sound? Was it related to Bojack’s case, perhaps?”) “What did you do after that?”

Brian: “Well, skip past me hiding behind a tree to see if anyone, or anything, was going to leave the database’s entrance, I tried going back inside. That’s when I found that the door had been locked. But, I don’t know why. Maybe it gets locked at a certain time for maintenance or so we can’t take files late at night? I was a bit worried going back to the VR facility empty handed, but fortunately L wasn’t mad at all. In fact, he had completely forgotten he had even sent me on the errand since I took so long. Haha… *Kinda did it all for nothing in the end* .”

Hayasaka: “Hm, I don’t think so. After all, what you’ve just told me feels honestly rather important to the case.”

Brian: “Maybe. We’ll just have to see later, huh?”

Hayasaka: “Thank you for that account.”

Brian: “No problem. Just, um, let’s keep the parts about me freaking out between us, okay?”

Hayasaka: “ *Sigh* , of course.”

Truth bullet obtained: Brian’s Account

Brian: “I guess it’s time to start looking around, huh? Should we search the database before going over to Bojack? That’s what you wanted to do with Retsuko last time we investigated together.”

Hayasaka turned to Bojack again, focus blurring in and out.

Hayasaka: “...No. I need to stop being so cowardly and just… go for it.”

Brian: “H-Huh? Hayasaka, you don’t need to push yourself. I understand how stressful this has been, but…”

Brian trailed off as Hayasaka turned to look at him, eyes hardened and lip thinned.

Hayasaka: “I want to do this.”

A few nods were returned by Brian after a blank look. The two then walked over to where just a couple were standing around Bojack’s body.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka? I’m surprised ya over here so soon.”

Hayasaka: “I just want to start investigating the most important part this time around.”

Kurumada: “Heh, if Mai could see you now, she’d be pretty proud.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Brian: “That’s nice of you to say, Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “Eh? What’re you doin’ here?”

Brian: “E-Erm, you didn’t see me walk over here too?”

Unsure on how to respond to the odd encounter, Hayasaka stepped closer to the body. He found a familiar face already hunched over and examining the head wound.

Hayasaka: (“As expected, L is already here…”) “I hope it’s not too gorey, h-haha…”

L: “I believe we have different perceptions of the term ‘gorey’.”

Hayasaka: “P-Perhaps we do…”

Sucking in a breath, he knelt down to garner a closer look.

Brian: “Anything, uh, worth noting?”

Hayasaka: “Whatever happened, it caused quite an indent in his head. I assume it caused damage to the cranium and brain. It might’ve led to an immediate death if he was unlucky…”

Kurumada: “I wonder if that still applies, considerin’ his height, weight and the fact that he’s a horse.”

Hayasaka: “That is… true, I suppose.” (“However, it’s not like I have any veterinary experience to confirm anything…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bojack’s Head Wound

Hayasaka: “...That seems to be the only wound on his body.”

L: “Peculiar, isn’t it? Every victim thus far has suffered at least multiple wounds on their body, but in Bojack’s case, things appear to be more clear cut.”

Hayasaka: (“How morbid to comment… But of course, the literal detective is used to this, Hayasaka. Just be thankful you’re not that far gone into this.”)

Brian: “At least you didn’t have to look at anything too bloody this time around, right?”

Hayasaka: “Ha, it’s the least of a win.”

Kurumada: “But have any of ya noticed this yet?”

Hayasaka: “Hn?”

Kurumada gestured his hand around Bojack, index finger pointed loosely out.

Kurumada: “He looks damn ruffed up.”

Hayasaka: “Ruffed up?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, his hair, or, uh, *mane* , looks kinda messed up. Not to mention his clothes are all tugged and pulled. Looks like he had a damn field day.”

L: “Hm, it appears you may be correct.”

Hayasaka: “How… How did you pick up on that so easily, Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “Heheh, just reminded me of a sleazy bar guy, y’know? I’ve seen plenty in my career. Afterparties sure are something.”

Hayasaka: “R…Right, haha.” (“Then again, I do remember Bojack being somewhat of a narcissist, keeping up his appearance or whatnot. Not often did he ever look like this. Maybe I should keep a note of it.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bojack’s Ruffed-Up Appearance

Hayasaka: (“Hm, now that I’m here…”) “Ah, L?”

L: “Yes?”

Hayasaka: “Do you mind if I ask you what you and Brian were doing in the VR facility last night?”

L: “I assume he has already disclosed to you about our trip. In that case, I’ll provide a few extra details. We were there from 12 to 3A.M., after an unsuccessful retry into the VR world.”

Kurumada: “Hold on. Ya really used those fuckin’ headsets again?”

Brian: “Well, sort of. We were desperate at that point.”

L: “With the damage of the hallucination program already prevalent, it wasn’t as if anything else would have harmed us. Regardless, our results were poor: no evidence as to where the program could have been hidden was found, and the code for the VR world was heavily encrypted. It had quite the abnormal encryption method, I must say. This was why I tasked Brian with retrieving a file from the database to see if we could crack any helpful information from it.”

Brian: “Ah, I’m sorry. If only we worked harder, then maybe we would’ve found a way to stop the hallucinations before a murder happened…”

Hayasaka: “No, it’s alright. It wasn’t either of your responsibilities to fix it for us in the end. Thank you anyway, L.”

L: “Mm.”

Truth bullet obtained: L’s Account

Kurumada: “Gonna go look around for clues now?”

Hayasaka: “That’s the plan…”

Brian: “Don’t worry, Hayasaka. I’m right behind you.”

Kurumada: “Oh great…”

Brian: “W-What?”

Kurumada: “Nothin’! Just get on ya way!”

Brian: “Sorry!”

As Brian scampered off, Hayasaka quickly followed to catch up.

Brian: “So, what’re we looking for now?”

Hayasaka: “Um… Anything that could be considered a weapon I su–”

Hayasaka felt his words get choked up in his throat as his eyes landed on something particularly unpleasant sitting around a corner. Dried blood was caked around a cabinet’s edge, trailing down its side. With how much red there was, he wondered if the files inside had been stained, and how little Nesos probably cared.

Unbeknownst to him, Brian hadn’t noticed him freeze until he had bumped into his side.

Brian: “Oops. Huh? What’s wrong?”

Hayasaka pointed to the cabinet. Brian’s previously clueless face dropped.

Brian: “ *Oh, how lovely…* ”

As Hayasaka kept his eyes on the cabinet, he felt the need to step closer.

Hayasaka: “Well that… looks like a blood splatter, doesn’t it? And, it seems to have dripped down the side.”

Brian: “That sounds kinda familiar. Isn’t that like the bloody sink we found during Retsuko’s case? For a moment in the trial, we thought she had hit her head on it. I-I mean, that was debunked, of course, but I was just saying, haha…”

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps Bojack hit his head on the cabinet. But, how? And if that’s the case, then how come his body is nowhere near it now?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bloody Cabinet Corner

Happy to tear his eyes from the cabinet, Hayasaka was hopelessly faced with yet another bloody sight on the floor below. Hardly a foot away laid a smudged trail, causing Hayasaka to slip a subconscious step back. He felt Brian step closer to him, staring down at the trail too.

Brian: "And here I said we wouldn't have to deal with looking at any more blood…"

Hayasaka: "That's where wishful thinking gets you… Ah, wait. This appears to trail over to where Bojack's body is."

Brian: "Do you think he was dragged over there? Oh, actually, scratch that. I'm not sure if any of us are capable of, er, that."

Hayasaka: "He… He is rather large. I'm not sure how much he weighs, to be completely honest."

Brian: "Mm… Maybe Kurumada could do it?"

Hayasaka's eyes quickly shot over to Brian.

Brian: "A-Ah! Well, um, not to say I'm trying to incriminate him in any way! I-I-I was just making a passing comment!"

Hayasaka: "No, I-I understand."

Truth bullet obtained: Blood Trail

Shaking off the thought, Hayasaka adjusted his glasses as he pondered on the case.

Brian: "Gah, I'm sorry, but I just can't take this smell anymore!"

Hayasaka: “The blood? I know, it’s rather off putting, but it's something we have to put up with…”

Brian: “N-No, no that. It’s something else – it’s so sour and unpleasant.”

Hayasaka: “Now that you mention it… I *can* smell something else.”

Brian: “Wait, it must be that!”

Pointing down the aisle, Brian directed Hayasaka’s attention toward a heap of green glass scattered around. Curious, Hayasaka went to carefully pick up one of the larger shards. On one side, a label was stuck to the glass.

Hayasaka: “This looks like a label meant for alcohol…”

Brian: “Yeah, that’s… that’s probably what we could smell alright. From how horrible it was, I’m guessing it's beer.”

Hayasaka: “You’re guessing based on your favour of its smell? Haha…”

Brian: “Well, y-you know… *It’s not up there in terms of punch* .”

Hayasaka held back another chuckle.

Hayasaka: “Alcohol… It wouldn’t be atypical for Bojack to be around that. But in the database of all places, it hardly seems like an appropriate setting for a drink. And as well as that… Why is the entire bottle smashed in the first place?”

Brian: “Maybe when Bojack hit his head, he also smashed the bottle in his hand? Going on the idea he was holding it at the time, that is.”

Hayasaka: (“Does this mean Bojack was drunk during the events leading up to his death? I think I’d better keep that in mind.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Smashed Beer Bottle

Scanning around the aisle once more, Hayasaka let out a soft sigh.

Hayasaka: “I think that’s everything over here.”

Brian: “Phew. Where to now?”

Hayasaka: (“Hm… Earlier, I did spot a certain someone walk off towards the monitors…”) “I think we should go check the back of the database.”

With that, the two made their way towards the desks of monitors. By chance, a familiar pink-haired boy was quietly observing something on the desk.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello, Saiki.”

Turning for a brief moment, Saiki nodded at him.

Hayasaka: “So, you wanted to investigate on your own this time?”

Saiki: “ *There’s a lot less of us. We need to split up more often.* ”

Brian: “What a brutally honest way of putting it…”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, I was only mentioning it as I don’t think I’ve ever seen you investigate on your own before.”

Saiki paused, before shrugging.

Hayasaka: “Haha, s-sorry. I didn’t mean anything by it, really. So, what’re you looking at?”

The boy pointed at a monitor; its screen was broken, cracked in and sitting pitiful beside its intact counterparts.

Brian: “Huh, that’s, well… Did it always look like that?”

Hayasaka: “When Kurumada and I first investigated the database, I’m almost certain none of the monitors were ever broken before…”

Saiki: “ *It was probably smashed by something* .”

Brian: “Mm… What are the odds someone punched it?”

Saiki: “ *Good grief* .”

Brian: “H-Hey! I was just joking! There would be a bunch of glass all up in their hand if so, anyway.”

Hayasaka: (“Then why would you even bring it up in the first place…?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Broken Monitor

Saiki: “ *It’s not just the monitor that’s broken. And it’s something more suspicious, too* .”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Saiki then handed him a tablet. Being cautious while turning it around in his hands, he saw how it was similarly cracked in places like the monitor.

Hayasaka: “Judging by its size, this must be a tablet like the ones we were given…”

Brian: “I wonder who it belongs to…”

Saiki: “ *That’s what I was wondering* .”

Hayasaka: “Well it’s sure not mine, h-haha. So, ah, where did you find this, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *It was just lying on the desk next to the monitor* .”

Hayasaka: “I see… Thank you for your findings.”

Truth bullet obtained: Broken Tablet

Saiki: “ *That’s basically everything I’ve found so far over here* .”

Brian: “Then, where should we go next Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Well… Ah, wasn’t the database previously locked? Perhaps we should take a look at the front entrance for any clues on how it was done, or why.”

Exchanging a short goodbye to Saiki, the two walked along the nearest aisle all the way back down to the door at the entrance. Hayasaka began to scan around the perimeter of the door, fiddling with the handle and frame to see if anything had been tampered with. However, he was met with nothing out of the ordinary for a seemingly normal door. Stepping back, he rubbed his wrists.

Hayasaka: “Hey, Brian? Can you–can you see anything wrong with the door?”

But as Hayasaka went to look beside him, no one was there.

Brian: “Back here.”

Turning around, he found Brian standing over a cabinet laying on its side just a few ways back.

Hayasaka: “Wh– *Ah* … Brian, you could have spoken up about that earlier. I feel like such an idiot looking over the door so diligently when that was sitting right there the whole time…”

Brian: “Oh. S-Sorry. It’s just that, uh, the way you were looking over the door looked like something right out of a detective show. It was kinda impressive, honestly…”

Hayasaka: (“S-Surely not, right…?”)

Brushing the impromptu compliment aside, Hayasaka walked closer to the cabinet.

Hayasaka: “Why is this cabinet knocked over, anyway?”

Brian: “Well, unlike the cabinets further in the database, this one’s much smaller in size. At least we know it’s possible to knock it over easier.”

Hayasaka: (“What a strange array of evidence so far…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Knocked Over Cabinet

Out of the corner of his eye, Hayasaka noticed someone approaching them.

Latte: “Yoo-hoo, you two.”

Brian: “Y-Yoo hoo?”

Latte: “Oops, sorry, was that a little too casual in this situation?”

Hayasaka: “Was there something you needed, Latte?”

Latte: “I think I found something suspicious, but I’m a little hesitant to look into it any further without a helping hand. I hope you don’t mind, but you two look quite in the zone with this.”

Hayasaka: “Well, I suppose I don’t mind taking a look.” (“I wonder what made her so cautious in the first place?”)

Latte: “Thanks. It’s just over here.”

Latte then led them down towards one end of the database, and gestured to a circuit breaker mounted to the wall. What irked Hayasaka, however, was that it was wide open, internal circuitry exposed and wires ready to snap at any unsuspecting victim.

Latte: “You see? I would’ve looked more into it on my own, but I was afraid of getting a bit of a shock. Wiring isn’t much of my forte.”

Hayasaka: “A *bit* of a shock you say…? H-Hah, I don’t think I’m all that eager myself…”

Brian: “Hey, I could take a look. I had to deal with a few technical issues back at my old job, anyway. Just give me a grilled cheese wrapped in aluminium foil and an IT guy on the 3rd floor, heheh.”

Latte: “Huh?”

Brian: “N-Nevermind… Inside joke with myself.”

Pushing aside his sulk, Brian stepped up to the breaker and placed his briefcase down.

Latte: “Be careful, dear!”

Despite this, it wasn’t long after Brian started to check around that he abruptly pinched his nose in disgust.

Brian: “Eugh! What’s with it with this *smell* ?!”

Hayasaka: “A-Again?”

Latte: “Hey, I thought I smelt something funny around here too!”

Brian: “It’s–it’s the beer again!”

Hayasaka: “Huh? I-It is?” (“Who would even think to bring beer around a circuit breaker?”)

Brian: “Well, in other non-smell related news, I can’t see anything out of the ordinary here, other than I think it looks kind of damaged.”

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“This might be linked to why the lights went out in Brian’s story. I’ll keep it in mind, just in case.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Damaged Circuit Breaker

Latte: “Thank you for volunteering to do that for us, Brian!”

In the midst of retrieving his briefcase, Brian rubbed the back of his head.

Brian: “I-I mean, I practically did the bare minimum. Let’s just hope I didn’t miss anything – it’s just so hard to see in here, with the database being sort of dark and all.”

Hayasaka: “Now that you mention it, our only lightsource has come from the front entrance and ceiling windows, hasn’t… it… *Huh* ?”

As Hayasaka had been peering up to view said windows, his attention was caught on one in particular that was open.

Brian: “What is it?”

Hayasaka: “That window… is right above Bojack’s body…”

Brian: “Oh, y-you’re right. I didn’t even know they could be opened… Should we go take a look?”

Hayasaka: “I think it would be best to.”

Quickly thanking Latte for her find, the two sped off back to where Kurumada and L were still standing around Bojack.

L: “I see you’re interested in that window above, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “I–Huh? H-How did you know that? I haven't even said anything yet.”

L: “You didn’t need to. With the way your head was tilted up while walking over here, it was a clear indicator you were suspicious of something residing above.”

Brian: “That’s, wow, uh, impressive. And a bit crazy.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but I’m not sure how we’re supposed to even check it out. After all, it’s not like there’s a ladder or stool around I could use, haha…”

Kurumada: “Heh, that’s no problem. Just climb on my shoulders n’ I’ll get ya up there.”

Hayasaka: “You–w-what? K-Kurumada, that’s…”

Kurumada: “That’s what?”

Hayasaka: “Well you can’t… I can’t do that…”

Kurumada: “Why not? You said it yourself: there ain’t many other options. S’not like I mind, anyway, heheh.”

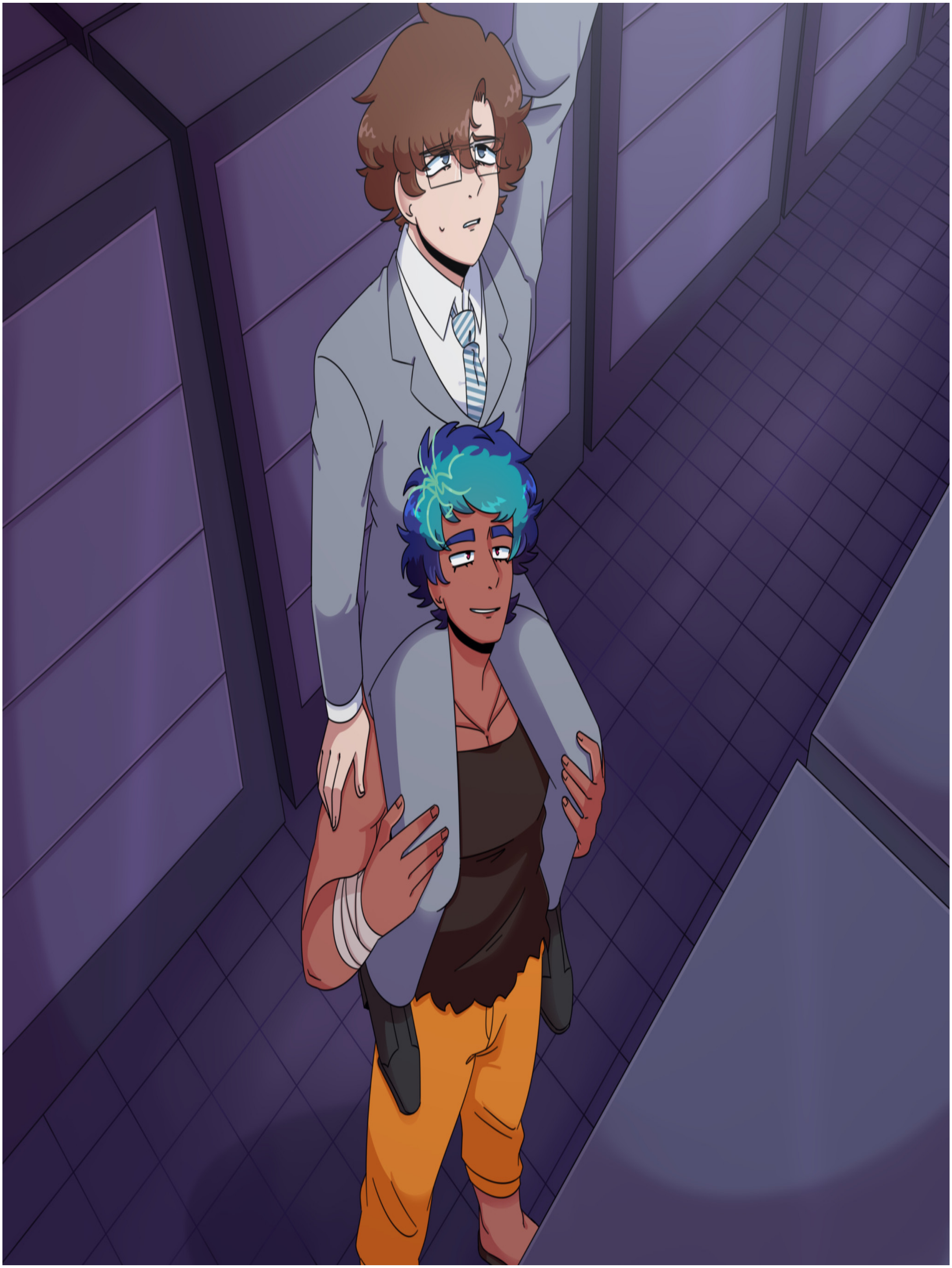
Hayasaka: “Yes, b-but I don’t…”

Hayasaka nervously darted his eyes around, feeling his cheeks heat up. Glancing back at Kurumada and his half-reassuring, half-smug smile, he felt his shoulders loosen.

Hayasaka: “...I-I suppose I’m too curious to pass up the offer.”

Kurumada: “Don’t worry. I’ll be gentle with ya.”

Leaning down onto one knee, Kurumada gestured for Hayasaka to climb on. Taking a deep breath, he awkwardly hobbled onto his shoulders and attempted to find a comfortable position. Without much warning, Kurumada jumped back up to his full height, forcing Hayasaka to cling to him a little tighter lest he preferred to slip off altogether.



Kurumada: “Heheh. Don’t look down.”

Clenching his teeth, Hayasaka tried to convince himself to relax. Lifting an arm up, he managed to reach out to the window.

Brian: “What can you see?”

Hayasaka: “I-It looks like it can only be open and closed from the inside. And… I believe I could fit my head through it. There’s a chance a whole person could fit through it, in fact.”

Kurumada: “Nothin’ suspicious?”

Hayasaka: “...Not really. In that case, may I finally be let down now?”

Kurumada: “Aw, kinda enjoy havin’ you on my shoulders though.”

Kurumada patted his knee. Hayasaka could only hope his face wasn’t as red as he felt it was.

Hayasaka: “ *Brian and L are watching* …”

Letting out another chuckle, Kurumada dropped down to let him off. Slightly disoriented, and somewhat flustered, Hayasaka steadied himself on the ground.

Hayasaka: (“I’ve never been more thankful to be my usual height again… L-Let’s just focus on the window. While nothing off about it, it’s best to not forget it.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Roof Window

Brian: “Oh, actually, while we’re here…”

Crouching down, Brian carefully reached over into Bojack’s blazer pocket.

Brian: “...Huh.”

Kurumada: “The hell are ya doin’? Pick pocketin’ the damn guy after he’s dead or something?”

Brian: “Huh? N-No! I was just trying to find his tablet.”

Kurumada: “That *still* just sounds like ya robbing him.”

Brian: “W-What would I even gain from stealing it??”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada…”

Kurumada: “Well ya not even checkin’ properly! Lemme do it.”

Shoving Brian aside a little too forcefully, Kurumada dived his hand into Bojack’s pant pockets.

Kurumada: “Couldn’t swipe jack if ya wanted. There’s nothing on him 'cept his room key.”

Hayasaka: “Wait, what? But what about his tablet?”

Kurumada: “I dunno, maybe he left it someplace else?”

Brian: “Hm…”

L: “I must say, that was rather entertaining.”

Hayasaka: (“Entertaining wouldn’t exactly be the way I’d describe it. But, I know why Brian did that. I’m starting to make some connections here…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bojack’s Missing Tablet

Kurumada: “What’re ya planning to look at now?”

Hayasaka: “I haven’t thought about that…”

L: “Perhaps you’ve found something noteworthy during your investigation thus far you could expand your search on.”

Brian: “Well, we *did* come across alcohol in the database, if that’s anything.”

L: “Alcohol… Intriguing. Then, why don’t you find out more about Bojack’s drinking habits? His room should prove a good start for clues.”

Brian: “But would that be enough to find out his habits? It’s not like we can ask him directly, o-obviously…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but we *could* ask someone else who knew him the best from everyone still here…”

Brian: “Oh, right: Jesse!”

Hayasaka: “Thank you for the suggestion, L. We’ll be on our way now.”

L: “Don’t be too long. We may not have much time left.”

Kurumada: “What’s more important is that ya don’t overwork yourself. The hotel’s a damn walk n’ a bit away, y’know?”

Hayasaka: “W-We’ll keep both in mind…”

With Brian in tow, Hayasaka made his way out of the database. Once he was hit with a much fresher gust of air, he realised just how stuffy the database really was on his lungs. Shaking that aside, he saw Jesse and Natsuki leaning against the building’s wall. Jesse was puffing on a cigarette, eyes glazed over as he stared down at the grass at his feet. Natsuki on the other hand was covering her nose and mouth with her hands, causing Hayasaka’s brows to crease.

Hayasaka: “Hey, ah, I-I don’t think you should be doing that. Natsuki’s clearly uncomfortable…”

Natsuki: “It’s alright. I don’t mind it. It just helps him to calm down.”

Brian: “Are, um, cigarettes notorious for doing that exactly, though?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose the nicotine does have an antidepressant effect to it.”

Jesse: “S’a… real nice you’re all talkin’ ‘bout me like I’m not even here.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry. I promise it wasn’t my intention to be rude to you…”

Jesse snuck a glance over, before shaking his head with a sigh.

Jesse: “It’s–it’s whatever. How’s the investigation goin’?”

Brian: “Don’t worry. We’ve found a lot of useful evidence so far. Um, we’ve just come out here to ask you a question.”

Hayasaka noticed Jesse’s shoulders tense.

Hayasaka: “I-It’s nothing too hard. We just wanted to know if you had any idea about Bojack’s drinking habits.”

Jesse: “Oh…”

Jesse kicked the heel of his foot against the wall, before nodding.

Jesse: “Yeah, I did. Bojack… He was a heavy drinker. I mean, yeah, you ‘prolly could tell without spendin’ that much time around him. But it was a lot more than what you’d expect, y’know? I was impressed at first: he could start in the morning, and then keep goin’ ‘til the late hours of night, with no sign of stoppin’. He had stopped drinkin’ in the stage bar, like, *completely* , after Retsuko’s death, but that didn’t stop him from hoardin’ bottles in his room n’ the restaurant.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so… How much could Bojack handle before getting drunk?”

Jesse: “I dunno. It looked like he was able to handle any type’a alcohol for a good while. Lots of it, too.”

Hayasaka: “Due to his continuous heavy drinking, I assume?”

Jesse: “That’s one half. It’s also ‘cuz he weighed about twelve-hundred pounds. That let him drink a whole lot before even gettin’ drunk in the first place. Much more than a typical person, or human, as he put it.”

Brian: “T-Twelve-hundred?! Even for a horse, I didn’t think he weighed *that* much!”

Jesse’s breath hitched on a dry chuckle.

Jesse: “...I thought he was jokin’ too when he first told me.”

Hayasaka: (“That… definitely was unexpected. But, it feels like very important information.”) “Thank you for telling us that, Jesse.”

Jesse: “Yeah, unless it means jack-all to you later.”

Natsuki: “But, it felt good to talk about him at least, right?”

Jesse: “...Maybe. I dunno.”

Truth bullet obtained: Jesse’s Account

Brian: “Ah, how much time do we have left? We should probably head over to Bojack’s room now.”

Jesse: “Wait, you’re goin’ to Bojack’s room? Can I–can we tag along?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah… I’m sure Jesse has his reasons for wanting to come along.”) “Of course.”

Joined by the two new companions, they sped-walked all the way back to the hotel, remaining conscious of time. As Hayasaka approached Bojack’s door, he went to push down the handle only to be met with a firm pressure back.

Hayasaka: “Ah… It’s locked?”

Brian: “Why do you look so confused about that?”

Natsuki: “And why did you try to just open his door like that, anyway?”

Hayasaka: ("Jeeze, how embarrassing…") "S-Sorry, it's just that during the last investigation where Saiki and I went to Yuri's room to retrieve her poem, her door was already unlocked. Here, I just, ah, assumed the same would ring true."

Natsuki: "Huh? Wait, did you say Yuri's door was unlocked? That's… that's really weird."

Jesse: "Yeah, like, when a person dies, their room is locked up forever. Found out the hard way when I tried to go into Mr. White's room after he died."

Hayasaka: ("Then, had Nesos unlocked Yuri's door with the specific goal for someone to find her poem, or, was it all Yuri's doing in the end…? Surely, Nesos has never been *that* generous… Then… No, it's probably not a good idea to bring up while Natsuki's here, anyway.")

Natsuki: " *Huff* , then how are we even supposed to get inside his room?"

Brian: "Mm, maybe we could get the attention of someone from a camera?"

Hayasaka: "Brian, that's a little…"

But Brian was already wandering off down the hall, waving his arms above at a nearby security camera.

Brian: "Hey! Hello? Is–is anyone watching? You probably are, so, uh–"

He pointed back to Bojack's room.

Brian: "–Can you let us in Bojack's room? Mr, or, miss camera… person?"

???: "Gwahahaha!!"

Natsuki: “Eek!”

Pouncing from behind a corner, Monotora produced a gravelly laugh, body jittering and churning to keep up with their intense reaction. Hayasaka hadn’t realised Brian had rushed back over until he felt his shoulder bash into his own.

Monotora: “Oh, *oh* , gahaha! Fucking, you’re just, you’re just *so fuckin’ funny,* Brian! Ya really gave Nesos a great laugh back there at ya dumbass-ery!”

Brian: “H-Huh? But I didn’t… *Nnn* …”

As Brian quietly sulked to himself, Jesse slammed his hand against Bojack’s door.

Jesse: “Hey, asshole! Let us inside Bojack’s room. We gotta for our investigation n’ shit!”

Monotora: “Mmm… Eh, sure.”

Extending a claw, Monotora gave it a good lick. Then, they stuck it right into the keyhole of the door, fiddling around until a click resounded out.

Brian: “Huh? How did you do that?”

Monotora: “Heheh, this ol’ thing? S’just that one of my claws doubles up as a master key, y’see? Did ya know that another one can inject poison just like a syringe? Hey, hey, wanna try it out, Brian?”

Brian: “N-N-No thanks!”

Monotora: “Kehehe! I was just jokin’ about that feature, anyhow!”

Monotora jumped off down the hall, leaving the four alone

Natsuki: “Jeeze… Monotora really likes to pick on you, huh Brian?”

Brian: “I-I don’t know why… Do I look that weak to them?”

Hayasaka: (“If that was the case, why haven’t they targeted me all that often?”)

Jesse: “Who cares about that right now? C’mon.”

Throwing open the door, Jesse stepped inside Bojack’s room. The others followed suit, Hayasaka only barely getting to look around before the overwhelming need to open a window or two struck him. To say the smell was god-awful would be an unfortunate understatement. Unlike his own room, it was considerably more untidy, an abundance of bottles strewn about every which place.

Natsuki: “God, he really was a drunkard. How could he even live like this? I mean, this smell is just… It just makes me wanna tear my nose off!”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “Oh… S-Sorry. I mean, he was kinda funny… sometimes…”

Jesse: “...Why’re you apologisin’? I was thinkin’ the exact same thing.”

Trying his best to push past the smell, Hayasaka darted his eyes around the room.

Hayasaka: (“There’s so many different bottles… Scotch, whiskey, vodka… A lot of vodka. Actually, more than a lot.”)

As he went to pick up a lone vodka bottle laying on the carpet, he read the label.

Hayasaka: ("Rather large… 750ml? All of them are… I didn't think there would be so many available. Then again, with the restaurant *and* stage bar stocking alcohol, I suppose it could've been possible. And, it wasn't if anyone else was hoarding it all like Bojack did.")

Jesse: "*... Damn drunkard* ."

Hayasaka had just picked up on what Jesse muttered under his breath, feeling a short tug at his chest. Carefully, he placed the bottle right-up onto the table.

Hayasaka: ("It's not much, but… Anyway, I'll keep what we've found in mind.")

Truth bullet obtained: Vodka Bottles

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: "Tiiiiimes up, bastards! Wonder how much ya managed to pack up into ya tiny brains this time? Heard a lot of complaints about smells – man, ya senses gotta be weak as hell. Anywho, meet me at Nesos Park on the first island, and be choppy about it. C'ya there, kehehe."

Brian: "Looks like we've run out of time. I hope we've got everything we need."

Natsuki: "Hey, Jesse, if we're quick, we could go back to the database and see Bojack one more time if you want."

Jesse shook his head.

Jesse: "I'm alright. We'd 'prolly just get punished for takin' too long."

Natsuki: "Are–are you sure? I mean, you…"

Jesse: “...S’fine, I swear. I don’t want you gettin’ in trouble or nothin’.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s… rather responsible of him. Even *I* wouldn’t mind him spending a few extra minutes with Bojack. This company… Well, they’ve proven themselves as nothing but malicious. I don’t care about going against them all that much anymore… If not for the punishments, that is.”)

The four then started to head over to the park. As they were closer than the others on the fourth island, they had to wait around a bit before they saw them appear from the path.

Latte: “Jesse, dear, how’re you feeling now?”

Attention on him, Jesse’s lip thinned as he shrugged.

Jesse: “...Somethin’ I can’t really describe.”

As he turned away, Latte could only nod solemnly.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka focused his attention onto Kurumada, who had crossed his arms with an earnest face.

Kurumada: “I don’t know if I want ya doin’ this trial. I mean, feels like we’ve hardly had any time to rest after the last one.”

Hayasaka: “I’ll… I’ll be fine. I’m doing it for Jesse’s sake, aren’t I? To figure out who killed his friend.”

Monotora: “Don’t forget, Dr. Downer, the killer’s one of ya! Or, maybe ya already gettin’ ready to sacrifice one of ya own again! Kehe!”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “Shut ya goddamn mouth, asshole! Hayasaka’s already suffered enough bullshit as it is!”

L: “I believe this filler is not necessary by now. I request we are just permitted into the trial grounds.”

Monotora: “Hey, hey! What’s with the fancy tongue? Just ‘cuz all the animals’ve died, doesn’t mean all the humans can gang up on me! You *know* I’m much stronger than you all realise.”

Someone’s reply must’ve struck a nerve in Monotora, as they slammed down onto the loose tile more aggressively than usual. Yet, as violent as the shakes were, Hayasaka wasn’t as phased as before. Sure, his heart remained racing in his chest, but the situation was familiar – like opening the daily news site to see the same depressing headlines.

As the pathway opened up, Monotora twisted their head back to the group.

Monotora: “Now then, I gotta meal to finish before dealin’ with you freaks. Human liver, if you were wonderin’ – kehehehe!”

And the tiger was gone once again.

Natsuki: “... *Disgusting* .”

Brian: “I hope it’s not from someone we used to know…”

Saiki: “ *What a great thought to bring to the trial* .”

Latte: “Hey, let’s not try to think like that. We should focus on what’s ahead of us now, don’t you think?”

Jesse: “...”

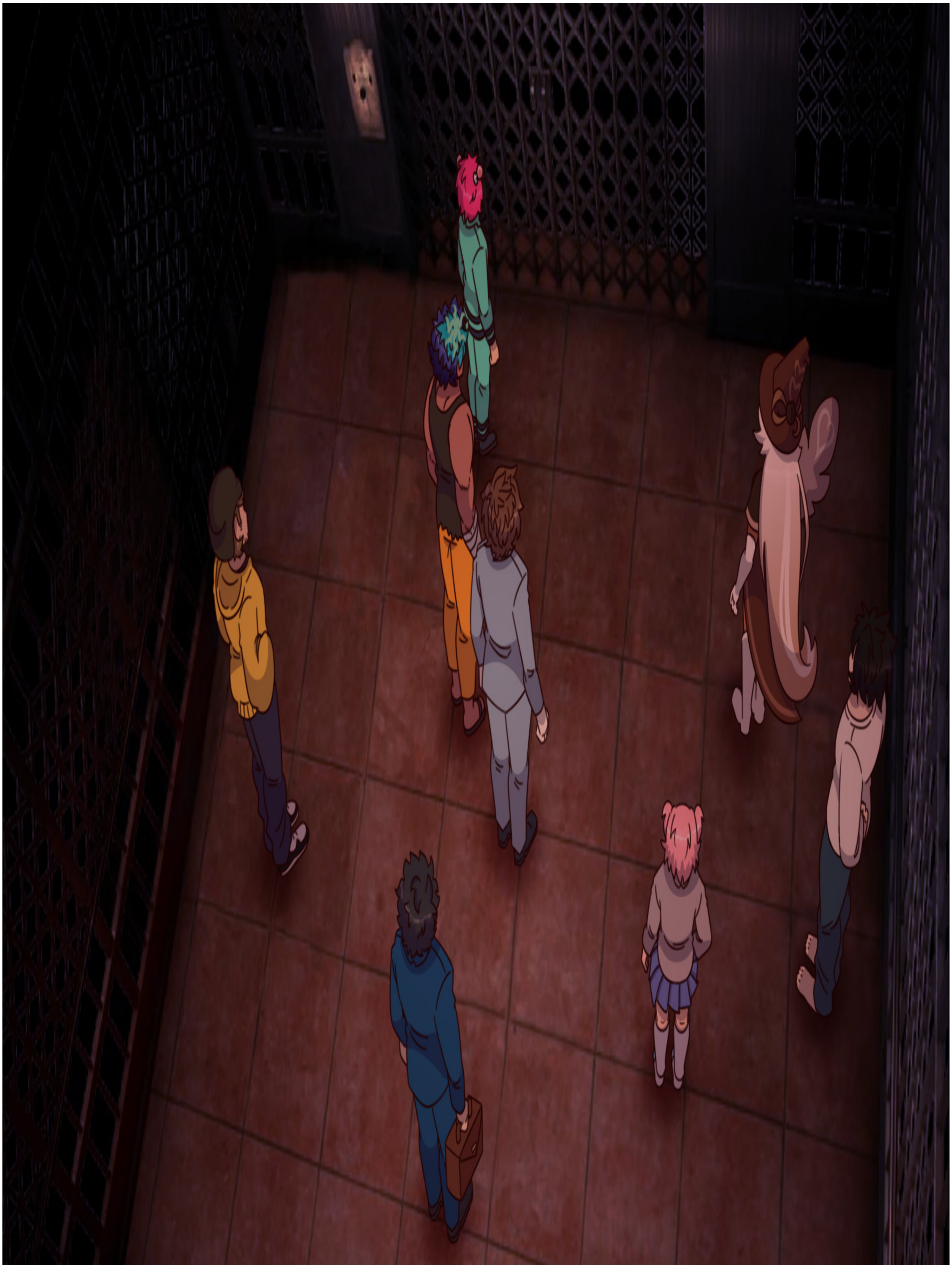
Natsuki: “...Jesse? Are you alright to go?”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “We’re gonna find out who killed Bojack, okay? I’m not gonna stop until we do.”

Jesse: “...Yeah. Yeah, me too. Let’s… just do this shit.”

Following one another down, the group descended the stairs towards the elevator. The doors snapped together much quicker in comparison to the time it took for everyone to board, as if Nesos had become impatient with their growing fatigue. After all, what fun would drained participants prove?



A sharp breeze flew past Hayasaka as the elevator rode further underground. He couldn't shake the new gap that had appeared beside him. A space that should've been occupied, but simply wasn't.

Hayasaka: ("If I was still hallucinating, perhaps she would appear, and…")

Hayasaka failed to finish the thought. Instead, he glanced behind him at the noise of rustling followed by a soft clank. Jesse had retrieved a flask from his pocket, unscrewing the lid and stealing a quick swig for himself. His head snapped back to the front as he noticed Jesse's eyes flick up from the flask.

Hayasaka: ("Bojack always used to take a flask to the trial, didn't he? It's not the best habit Jesse could've picked up from him, and I don't think it'd be ideal for him to get drunk during the trial, but… I suppose he deserves a small drink for now. I just hope–huh?")

Startled mid-thought, Hayasaka looked over at his hand that had been gently taken by one slightly larger than his own. Lifting his head up, his eyes met with Kurumada. The other must've noticed his confused, flushed face, as he let out a chuckle under his breath.

Kurumada: "I noticed ya lookin' a lil' uneasy."

Hayasaka: "Oh, I-I didn't realise…"

He was unsure what else to say. Then again, squeezing his hand back felt much better.

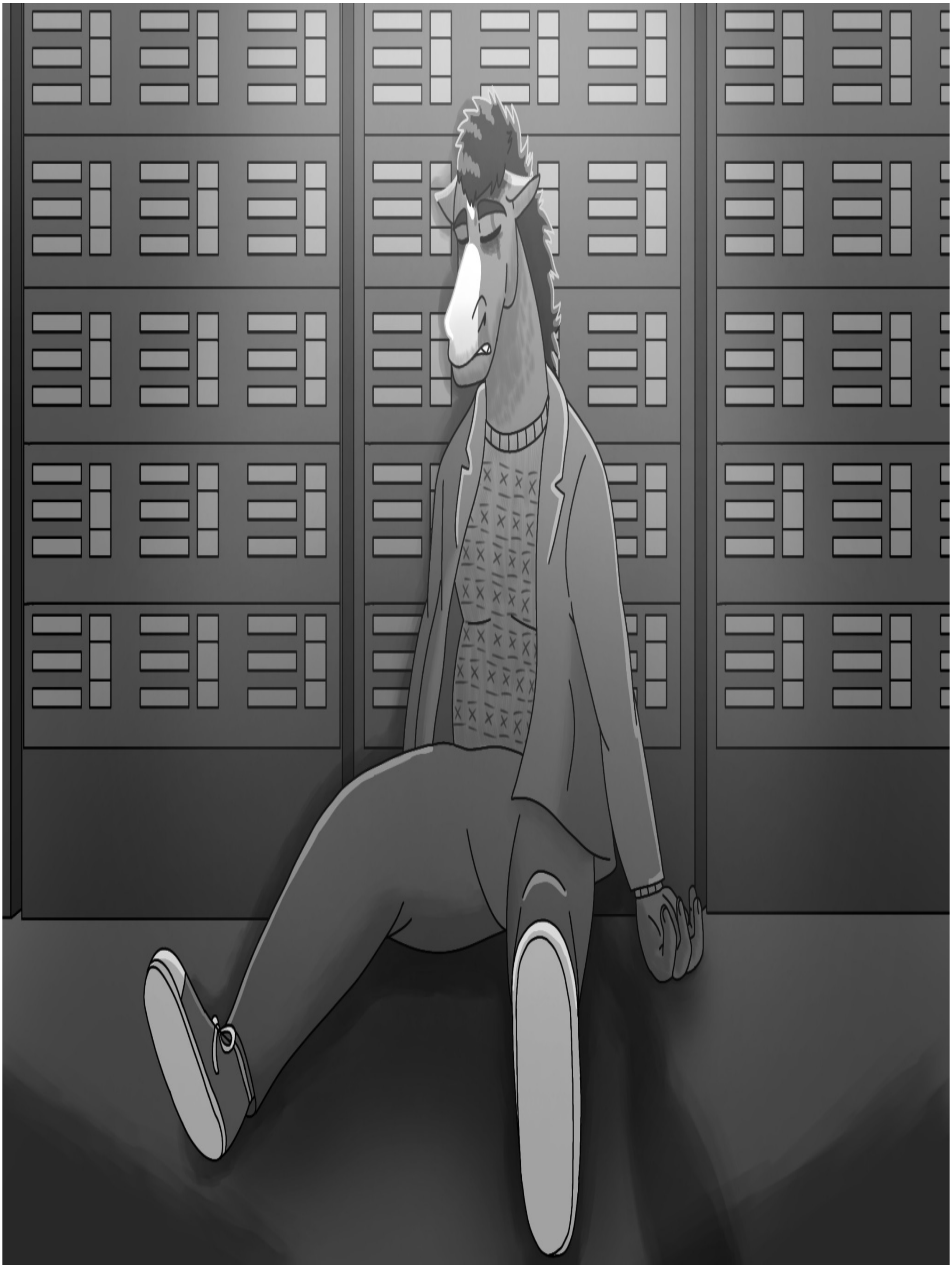
Something about the new colours spread around the circular grounds gave off a nostalgic sentiment as everyone stepped out of the elevator. Nothing could stop the unease that ate at them as some noticed Monotora sloppily lick their paws on their throne.

Monotora: "Whew! What a meal! Gotta hand it to them team players, they really feed me good when they try. Well? What're you all gawkin' at? Get to ya stands!"

Hayasaka's hand regretfully slipped from Kurumada's as they had to split to their separate podiums. He almost didn't want to leave from beside the elevator, eyes barely focusing on her portrait just opposite.

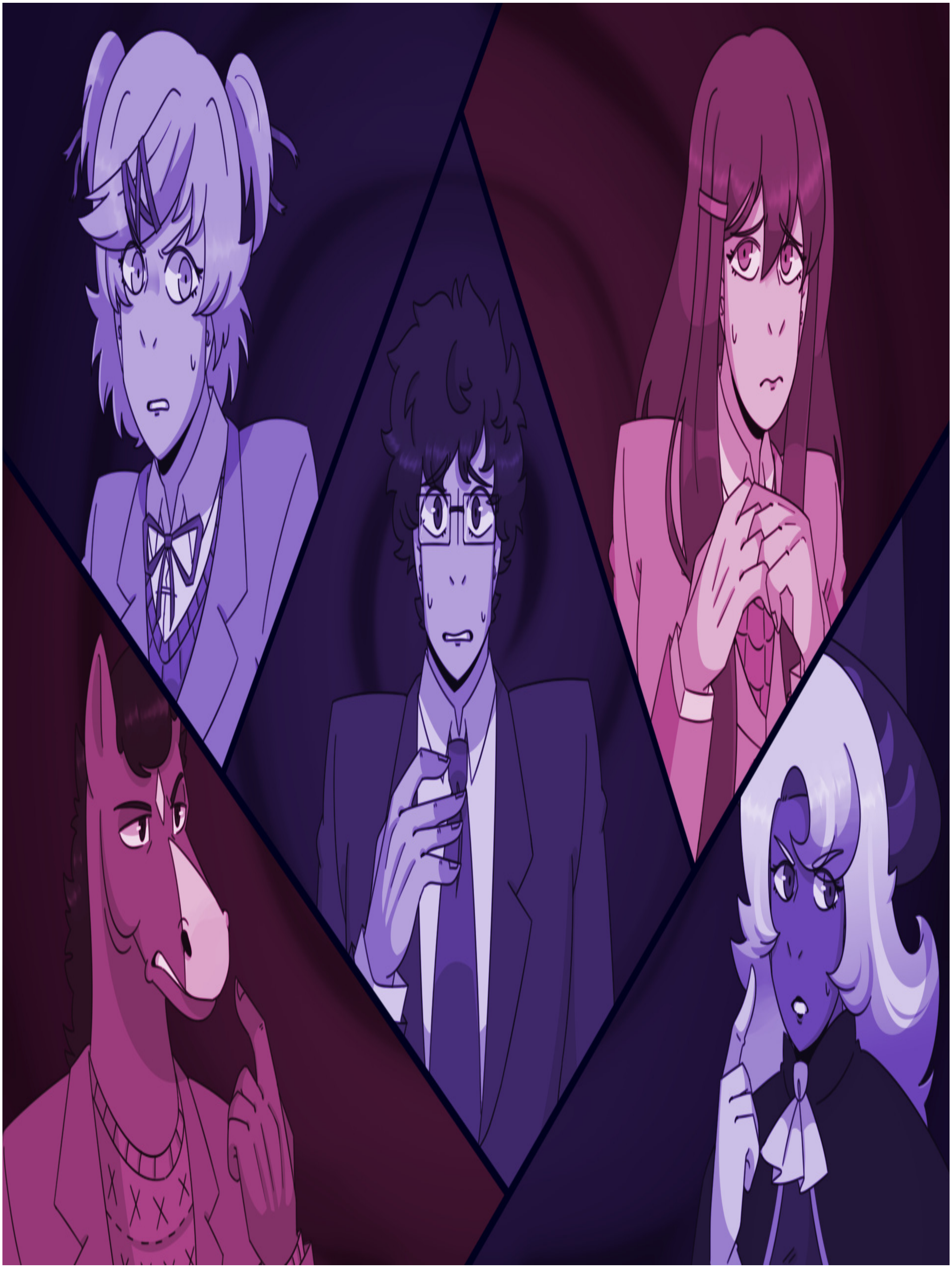
Mai's smile was what dug at him the most. It was almost identical to the one she shined so brightly in that damned oven before the smoke engulfed her. It was like Nesos had snapshot that exact moment to taunt him .

Hayasaka: ("I can't even look at it. I know I'd break down. But I can't do that. Not… not now. I have to focus on this, just for now.")

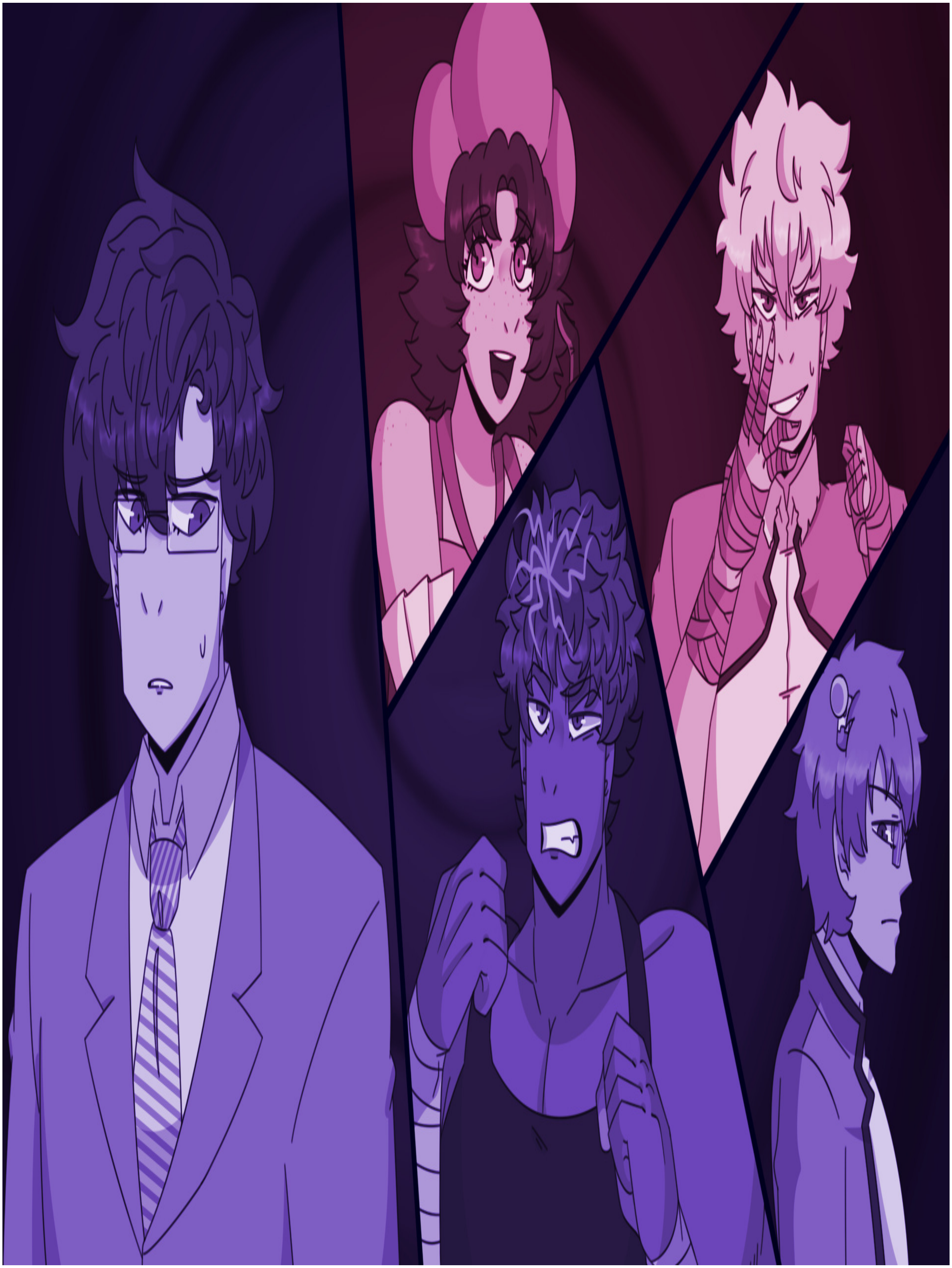


Hayasaka: ("Bojack… Narcissistic, easily irritated, and definitely what some may call an… *a-hole* , really in the purest sense of the term. But, he would surprise me sometimes. He could be sentimental and provide… somewhat helpful advice when he wanted to. And only when he wanted to. Regardless of that…")

Hayasaka: (“There’s been another murder. Another murder that interrupts everything we’ve been trying to work towards again. But… why? *Why* ?”)



Hayasaka: ("This isn't what we wanted. No one possibly would have wanted this, so why are we here? Who killed Bojack?")



Hayasaka: (“What kind of twisted fate is this? What kind of lies are hidden in this case, if at all? Even if I say I’m ready… That’s the biggest lie of all.”)

Hayasaka took a deep breath. The thought was back before he could even exhale.

The fourth executive trial had begun.

Chapter End Notes

> wow Brian rlly popped back to investigate another furry case w Hayasaka huh (and to experience more alcohol related ptsd /j)
>
> Also *looks at the old pre-trial CGs* oh lordy we have come a ways from that (tbh a similar thing happened during DR69 with art change/improvement lol)
>
> Anywho, I open up the board (the comments) to the jury (you guys) to convict the criminal (convict the crimi- wait)
> Do you have a theory? Or would you like to wait n' see it all unfold in the trial? It's your choice! (The trial will be posted in 2 weeks time so be prepared 😈)
>
> [very small edit 13.08.23] I just added like 4 extra words to clarify Bojack's pockets still contained his hotel room key. Small logical error on my part haha

Chapter 4: One's Reality is Another's Delusion (Executive Trial)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> When the trial is executive 🤯
>
> Oh man, here it is, the horsebo jackman trial (at 22k words)! In other news, Project Sekai fans how do we manifest luck I will grind for gems and then get nothing good from the gacha (especially not any of the featured cards) and it's driving me insane this is like Cookie Run all over again but even Cookie Run had luckier drop rates for me so this is just painful. Oh and I've also been replaying YTTD recently hehe (I am very normal when Hayasaka, Kurumada or Mai are on screen). I decided to buy the Steam version so I can get my grubby little hands on ch3 part 2 whenever it finally drops (I WILL wait patiently teehee)
>
> Without further ado, let's get to our podiums and start our detective arcs for the 4th time!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even as the numbers dwindle down, the death game's cycle continues to turn. Bojack, found dead in the most unlikely of places, shakes the remaining survivors. Just what had happened in the database that led to Bojack's final breath? Will their biggest questions be answered? And, is there something lurking just out of view?

TRUTH BULLETS

NESOS FILE 4

The victim is Bojack Horseman. The time of death is 2A.M. approx. The body was discovered in the database on the 4th island. The victim has suffered blunt force trauma to the head. No additional external wounds have been identified.

BOJACK'S HEAD WOUND

There is a wound on the right side of Bojack's head. From its prominently deep appearance, it is assumed to have caused damage to his cranium and brain. It is unsure if this caused an immediate death due to the factors of Bojack's height, weight and species.

BOJACK'S RUFFED-UP APPEARANCE

It has been pointed out how Bojack's mane and clothes appear to be unkept and messy. This contradicts how Bojack is usually seen to be keeping up his looks.

BOJACK'S MISSING TABLET

Upon investigating Bojack's pockets, no items could be found apart from his hotel room key. This is unusual, however, as he should've also at least been in possession of his tablet. It is uncertain where it is now, and what state it is in.

BLOODY CABINET

In one of the database aisles, a cabinet appears to be stained with blood. The blood begins at the corner and trails down, with a splatter on the edge. It has been theorised Bojack had hit his head on said cabinet, but it is uncertain how, and why it is so far away from where Bojack's body had been found.

BLOOD TRAIL

A smudged blood trail lies near the blood-stained cabinet, and can be followed to exactly where Bojack's body is currently. It has been suggested this was a sign that Bojack was dragged, but it is uncertain due to Bojack's weight.

SMASHED BEER BOTTLE

Broken glass had been found scattered around the same aisle as the blood-stained cabinet. From its green colour and label, it has been identified as beer. It has been questioned as to why alcohol is present in the database, and why it is currently broken. Additionally, this brings up the possibility that Bojack, if the bottle belonged to him, was intoxicated preceding the events of his death.

BROKEN MONITOR

At the far end of the database, there are a row of monitors. However, there is one monitor with its screen cracked and broken. During the initial investigation of the database, none of the monitors were ever identified to be broken.

BROKEN TABLET

A tablet was found on the same desks as the monitors with its screen cracked and smashed to pieces. From its appearance, it can be said to be the same tablets everyone was given at the start of the death game. However, it has not been identified who it belongs to.

KNOCKED OVER CABINET

A knocked over cabinet was found near the front entrance of the database. Due to its smaller size compared to the cabinets found further inside the database, it would be possible to knock it over with ease.

DAMAGED CIRCUIT BREAKER

A circuit breaker mounted to the wall in the database was found wide open, exposing its internal wiring. It appears to be damaged, and has been said to hold a similar scent to beer.

ROOF WINDOW

The only windows in the database are located on the ceiling, however one has been found open, specifically the window located directly above Bojack's body. It can only be opened and closed from inside the database, and can supposedly fit a whole person through onto the roof.

VODKA BOTTLES

Upon investigating Bojack's hotel room, a wide array of alcohol bottles were found stored inside, such as scotch, whiskey and beer. In particular, a large volume of vodka bottles were identified, the label claiming to hold 750ml per bottle.

BRIAN'S ACCOUNT

Brian went to the database around 2AM to look for a file L had tasked him to find. However during this a blackout occurred, followed by a loud crashing noise which scared Brian to the point of running out of the database. When Brian attempted to return to the database only a few minutes later, he found it was locked.

L'S ACCOUNT

In the attempt to figure out if they could reverse the effects of the hallucination program, L and Brian went to the VR facility, just next door to the database. They were there from at least the nighttime announcement at 12AM to 3AM.

JESSE'S ACCOUNT

As far as Jesse knew, Bojack was a heavy drinker, proving himself to be through his excessive morning drinking right into the evening. Bojack was able to handle any alcohol, even at large quantities. This is also due to the fact that Bojack weighs over 1,200 pounds, therefore requires more alcohol than the average human to get drunk.

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: ALL RISE!

Monotora: “Not sure about you lot, but I’m suddenly feelin’ extra pumped! Maybe it’s ‘cuz I get to watch you all scramble around like headless chickens? Kehehe! …Hm? I feel like I’m forgettin’ something…”

Kurumada: “Well if ya can’t remember it, then it ain’t important–”

Monotora: “Oh, that’s right! The trial explanation!”

Kurumada: “Oi, don’t interrupt–”

L: “Present our arguments for the culprit, arrive at a vote for the agreed upon blackened, and whoever is incorrect will face punishment. Anything I appear to be missing?”

Kurumada: “I think I’m gonna scream.”

Hayasaka: “P-Please don’t…”

Monotora: “...Ya know, as much as I don’t appreciate you takin’ my thunder, I gotta admit how gratifyin’ it is not having to repeat this spiel myself! That bein’ said: get to talkin’, prey!”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...O–Okay! So, what should we talk about first?”

Brian: “Um, well, I might have an idea about the–”

Jesse: “So what the fuck was Bojack doin’ at the database?”

Brian: “O-Or that. We could talk about that.”

Kurumada: “What’dya mean *what* ? Seems to me anyone’s endin’ up dead anywhere.”

Hayasaka: “Yes, but, I can’t see any logical connection here. After all, Bojack was never the type to care greatly on figuring out Nesos’ identity, nor any other mysteries surrounding the death game.”

Saiki: “ *I don’t think he really cared about anything.* ”

Latte: “That is a good point. What could he have been doing there?”

Natsuki: “Well, maybe he wasn’t there-there.”

Brian: “There-there?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, like, there, but not because he wanted to be.”

Kurumada: “I ain’t followin’ ya, kid.”

Natsuki: “I mean he must’ve been dragged here, you dummy!”

Saiki: “ *That’s not really the most pressing insult* .”

Hayasaka: (“Could Bojack have been dragged to the database? …No, not a chance.”)

JESSE’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “Unfortunately, Natsuki, I don’t think that would have been possible. Bojack just would’ve been too heavy to have been carried such a distance from anywhere else.”

Latte: “Heavy? Now, Hayasaka, Bojack might’ve been tall, but there’s no need to make assumptions.”

Hayasaka: “U-Um?”

Brian: “A-Actually, he’s right. You see… Oh jeeze, how do I put this? Well, Bojack was… He was–”

Jesse: “Twelve-hundred pounds.”

Kurumada: “Wait, *twelve-hundred* ?! Fuck! That’s a big ass horse!”

L: “Let’s not waste time gawking at a reasonable weight for an equestrian. Regardless, there’s reason to believe it was intended for Bojack and the culprit to be at the database for the murder.”

Natsuki: “Oh… W-Well, I was just trying to warm you guys up! Okay? S-So… Yeah!”

Kurumada: “So what? Was he lured there or somethin’?”

Latte: “But how would he be lured? As mentioned before, Bojack didn’t have anything to gain at the database.”

Natsuki: “Well, you know, he could have… Um… Ugh! Hey, aren’t you supposed to give us a prompt or something?”

L: “Hm? Have I always been viewed as a cheat sheet to you?”

Natsuki: “You know what I meant!”

L: “Perhaps it’s because there is simply not an answer to that question.”

Brian: “H…Huh? Well, that’s, uh, not good.”

Hayasaka: (“Not an answer? If I’ve learned anything here, if L doesn’t have an answer, then it’s not he who’s wrong, it’s the question. Then…”) “I… I might be completely wrong here, but are you supposedly suggesting that Bojack went to the database of his own free will?”

L: “Yes.”

Kurumada: “But you just– we just said that– *what* ?!”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. Just because you can’t think of a reason why he would go, it doesn’t make it automatically impossible* .”

Hayasaka: “Y…Yes. Something like that, h-haha…”

Jesse: “So, got a reason why? Or do you just get off on playin’ smartass?”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh?”

Kurumada: “Oi! Don’t be a jackass – *you* asked him to investigate for ya!”

Latte: “Hey now! Don’t be rude to him! Jesse’s lost a dear friend – it’s understandable he’s having a hard time right now.”

Kurumada: “Ain’t all of us?!”

Latte: “W-Well…”

Natsuki: “No! It’s–it’s my fault! I started this argument in the first place because I’m not trying hard enough! I said we were gonna figure this out, but I’m just screwing it up already–”

Jesse: “ *Nat* , wait.”

Natsuki: “Huh…?”

Jesse: “Don’t start blamin’ yourself over jack. I’m just… fuck, I dunno, I’m bein’ stubborn again.”

Hayasaka: “Jesse, it’s… it’s okay–”

Jesse: “No, it ain’t. I don’t want a repeat of the Jesse who kept shoutin’ at you all to figure out Mr. White’s murder. You’re all stressed out n’ shit. I just… I just wanna do this.”

Kurumada: “...Right. Yeah. Uh, sorry.”

Jesse: “We’re cool, man. C’mon, we’re just goin’ round in circles with this location bullshit, anyway.”

Brian: “Then… we could move onto the cause of death?”

L: “That would suffice.”

Natsuki: “Okay – let’s debate! Or… whatever.”

Saiki: “ *Are you actually enthusiastic about doing this or not?* ”

Hayasaka: ("Bojack's cause of death… This should hopefully lead us into a more fruitful discussion.")

NON-STOP DEBATE

Jesse: "Got any info on his death, then?"

Brian: "According to the Nesos file, Bojack had suffered from blunt force trauma."

Kurumada: "Anyone could'a made that guess after taking one look at the side of his head."

Jesse: "So that means he was hit in the head, right? With what?"

Natsuki: "Yeah – did you guys find a weapon lying around?"

Brian: "Well, not really…"

Latte: "Ah! Then, perhaps the killer discarded the weapon? That's why **we couldn't find it at the scene** !"

Natsuki: "Shoot, then how're we supposed to know what it was?"

Kurumada: "Eh, does it even matter? All we gotta know is someone hit him real hard."

Natsuki: "I guess…"

Hayasaka: ("Was Bojack attacked with a weapon? Yes, but, not in the way the others are thinking…")

BLOODY CABINET

Hayasaka: ("This is it!")

BREAK

Hayasaka: "Actually, I'm almost certain the weapon was still at the scene. W-Well, technically it wasn't a weapon, but part of the database itself: a cabinet."

Latte: "A cabinet?"

Brian: "Oh, that's right! Me and Hayasaka found a cabinet with the corner stained with blood. From the way it dried, it kinda looked like someone had hit their head on it."

Jesse: "So you're sayin'... what? Bojack hit his head on the cabinet?"

Natsuki: "Is that even possible? I mean, aren't those cabinets really tall?"

L: "Who else was a rather tall fellow?"

Saiki: " *He's probably the only one out of us who could've hit his head up there, anyway.* "

Hayasaka: "So, that's why I believe that must've been the fatal blow for Bojack's head wound–"

Natsuki: "It's not like that's right or anything! Baka!"

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “B ...*Baka* ?”

Natsuki: “I only said it ‘cuz it’s true! You’re ignoring something super obvious here! I said I wasn’t gonna stop ‘til we figure this out, so we can’t get anything this easy wrong!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah… Natsuki is very determined to help Jesse. It’s sweet, but, I’m a bit afraid of this snappy behaviour…”)

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Natsuki: “You’re saying Bojack hit his head on a cabinet, right? So, where was this bloody cabinet?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, it was somewhere on one of the centre aisles of the database…”

Natsuki: “Ha! I knew it! Then how did Bojack even hit his head on it? After all, we know **he died by the wall of servers** , so it would’ve been too far away!”

BLOOD TRAIL

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Although we did find Bojack by the servers, that doesn't mean he was necessarily murdered right there. In fact, there was a trail of blood from the cabinet that led right to where Bojack was sitting.”

Kurumada: “I see. So ya sayin’ he was dragged to the wall after he was hit.”

Natsuki: “Oh… D-Damnit, now *I’m* the baka…”

Saiki: “ *How ironic* .”

Jesse: “No, Nat’s still got a point.”

Natsuki: “Wait, I do?”

Jesse: “Yeah. I mean, c’mon, we already said this: Bojack *can’t* be carried, dragged, moved – whatever! Dude’s too heavy.”

L: “Yes, but the previous argument dealt with the dilemma of transporting Bojack over a long distance. Here, the distance between the cabinet and wall is trivial.”

Latte: “Hm, but I still feel like it puts up a bit of a challenge. Are any of us capable of doing something like that?”

Brian: “...”

Kurumada: “Oi! What’re you lookin’ at?!”

Brian: “N-No one! Uh, n-nothing?”

Monotora: “Gwehehe! Don’t be shy, Brian. If you’ve got a killer in mind, don’t be afraid to shout their name!”

Brian: “I-I don’t! A-And I don’t see the point in shouting when we can all hear each other perfectly well!”

Jesse: “Hold on. No, you… you gotta point there. Kurumada’s pretty damn jacked.”

Kurumada: “I swear to god – this is the same argument we bring up every fuckin’ trial! You all wanna be more creative next time?!”

Hayasaka: “H-Hang on, you’re not suspecting Kurumada solely based on that, are you?”

Saiki: “ *Well, he wasn’t the biggest fan of Bojack* .”

Kurumada: “Ain’t no one was!”

Jesse: “What the hell, asshole?!”

Brian: “J-Just to be clear, I didn’t say I suspected him, um, so–”

Natsuki: “The theory’s only possible if Kurumada’s the one who dragged Bojack, anyway!”

L: “That’s quite the bold claim without evidence.”

Jesse: “Evidence this, *bitch* !”

Jesse: “Kurumada’s the killer!”

Kurumada: “I ain’t the killer, damnit!”

Brian: “I-I didn’t say anyone was the killer!”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada… How on Earth does this keep happening to you? Ah, there has to be something I can use to prove his innocence. I just need to listen carefully for something useful.”)

MASS PANIC DEBATE

Jesse: “Here’s how it went down, alright?”

Kurumada: “How many times have I gotta say it – I’m not the killer just ‘cuz I got muscles!”

Brian: “I mean, there’s not really a clear reason why Kurumada would even need to drag Bojack, right?”

Jesse: “Kurumada must’a shoved Bojack hard enough to make him hit his head on that cabinet.”

Latte: “You are right! After all, you need more than just strength to commit murder.”

L: “That is correct.”

Jesse: “Then, he drags Bojack to the servers n’ **flees the scene** .”

Kurumada: “Exactly! Thank ya, Latte.”

Brian: “But at the same time… It’s near impossible for anyone else to have dragged Bojack, right?”

Natsuki: “Yeah – that makes sense! So, Kurumada’s gotta be the killer, right?”

Latte: “You also need a lot of wit too!”

L: “That is also correct.”

Jesse: “Ain’t no one else here capable. Let’s cut the shit and end this trial already.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, that’s– eh? What’dya mean by that?!”

Saiki: “ *So which is it? You just agreed with both sides of the argument* .”

Hayasaka: (“...That’s it. That’s what I needed to hear.”)

BRIAN’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Jesse, what you proposed… If Kurumada was the killer, and he fled the database after killing Bojack, then how come Brian never saw him leave from the front entrance?”

Jesse: “What the hell’re you talking about? What’s this gotta do with *him* ?”

Latte: “I’m a bit confused too. Is there something I’ve missed with you, Brian?”

Brian: “Oh! So, you see, I actually went to the database last night, around the same time Bojack died. And it’s just like Hayasaka said, I didn’t see Kurumada leave the database at all, so–”

Kurumada: “Hold the fuckin’ phone. *You* went to the database?!”

Brian: “Well, yeah, and–”

Natsuki: “Did you just say the same time Bojack died?”

Brian: “Yeah, because I–”

Saiki: “ *Stop digging a hole for yourself already* .”

Brian: “I-I’m not!”

L: “How about we all hear what Brian has to say, instead of interrupting him at every given moment.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I probably should’ve explained myself first. Sorry about that, Brian…”

Brian: “Heh, it’s okay. Uh, so, it’s like I said: I arrived at the database somewhere around 2A.M. to retrieve a file.”

Natsuki: “A file?”

Brian: “Yeah. It was for L – we were in the VR facility next door trying to figure out ways to reverse the effects of the hallucination program.”

Latte: “Oh, how sweet of you two!”

Kurumada: “And where do I – or not I, I guess – come into it?”

Brian: “I didn’t see anyone leave the database at the time, so it’s unlikely you’re the killer.”

Saiki: “ *If you saw no one leave, then you’re just saying that no one could be the killer* .”

Brian: “Well…”

Jesse: “‘Cept you.”

Brian: “W-Wait what?”

Natsuki: “You literally said you were at the database the exact same time Bojack died! It makes sense to say you saw no one if you’re the one who killed him anyway!”

Kurumada: “Damn, you got a point there.”

Brian: “Hey! I-I was just trying to save you from suspicion!”

Hayasaka: “I–I really doubt Brian’s the culprit, at least, knowing the rest of what happened.”

Latte: “What happened while you were at the database, dear? Did you happen to run into Bojack?”

Brian: “No, not at all. But, while I was looking for the file, everything in the database suddenly shut off. The lights, servers, anything with a power source basically. Not long after I began to go find the light switch, I heard a loud smashing noise… And… Um…”

Jesse: “And what?”

Brian: “I… *ran out of the database* .”

Saiki: “ *Well that was anticlimactic* .”

Kurumada: “What the hell? Why would ya do that for?”

Brian: “I-I was scared, alright? I thought, ah, I was going to be attacked, o-or something worse.”

Latte: “I think it’s smart you put your safety first!”

Natsuki: “Wait, so if you left the database, how did you know no one left in the end?”

Brian: “About that, h-haha… Um…”

Hayasaka: “...Brian kept watch from behind a tree. He, um, didn’t want to just leave outright, especially if an attacker was still inside, haha.”

Natsuki: “Oh, that makes sense. But you didn’t see anyone leave?”

Brian: “Uh, y–yeah–I waited for a while, but no one left the front entrance.”

Kurumada: “Couldn’t the killer just wait until you were gone to leave?”

Brian: “Well, no, b-because I actually went to check the door, but it was locked. That’s when I returned to the VR facility.”

Jesse: “And we’re just, what? Supposed to believe that?”

Latte: “I think it sounds possible! Why would Brian want to lie to us?”

Natsuki: “I mean, it's kinda the killer’s job to lie.”

Saiki: “ *So you’re just calling him the killer outright then* .”

Brian: “I-I’m telling the truth!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah dear, the story is a bit unorthodox, but… there *should* be someone to back it up.”)

L’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “L, you believe Brian, right?”

L: “Of course I do. After all, I was simply next door. If Brian had gotten himself involved in the crime, then I would have noticed a stark change in his behaviour or appearance once he had returned, both of which I did not.”

Brian: “Phew… T-Thanks, L.”

L: “Yet, it’s not just that. Recall this morning when we first attempted to enter the database.”

Latte: “It was wide open when I arrived…”

Saiki: “ *He’s not talking about you* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah, it was locked, wasn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, I had to break in n’ all that. Wait, does that mean the database was locked the whole night? How the hell did the killer even escape?”

L: “That is why I propose this case is what one may call a locked room mystery. Or building, in this case.”

Hayasaka: (“So if Brian never saw anyone leave the database, and no one could leave the database between when he found it locked and when we broke in this morning, then…”) “Doesn’t… Doesn’t that leave Bojack as the only one inside the database?”

Latte: “Are you saying *Bojack* was the killer?”

Natsuki: “Eh? How does that even work? How can the victim be the killer?”

L: “Think back to how Bojack was attacked. How often are such events used as methods of murder?”

Kurumada: “Hittin’ his head… Sounds more like a damn accident to me.”

Jesse: “What the hell? So–So you’re sayin’ he slipped or some shit? How?”

Hayasaka: ("Was this all an accident on Bojack's behalf? This case may be different than we originally thought…")

NON-STOP DEBATE

Natsuki: "I didn't think it was even possible to slip in the database. It felt like a super clean place to me."

Latte: "Maybe someone made the floor slippery somehow?"

Brian: "I feel like that would be too dangerous, that and all the electrical servers around…"

Saiki: " *You can't put it past Bojack to do something that stupid* ."

Jesse: "He was a dumbass, not a brain dead! Why the hell do you think Bojack would willingly cause himself an accident?"

Kurumada: "Because he was **a damn drunkard** ! Y'know how many accidents they get up to?"

Natsuki: "Hey, I know! Brian said something about a blackout, right? Maybe Bojack slipped 'cuz he couldn't see?"

Brian: "If that was the case, I'm thankful that *I* didn't slip while the power was out…"

Hayasaka: ("...This is an odd one to agree with, but…")

SMASHED BEER BOTTLE

Hayasaka: ("This is it!")

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “Actually, I think Kurumada’s right. I believe Bojack *was* drunk at the time.”

Kurumada: “Eh, I am? Hell, and I wasn’t even putin’ forth a proper argument or nothing, heheh.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t let it get to your head* .”

Natsuki: “I mean, okay, Bojack drank a ton, so I get where you’re coming from. But, I dunno, the database? Even I don’t know that many deadbeats who would try drinking somewhere like that.”

Hayasaka: “I had the exact same thought, until we found a broken beer bottle near the cabinet.”

Brian: “Eugh, even thinking about it reminds me of the smell…”

Jesse: “So what? That’s just one bottle. You think Bojack got drunk off a bit of beer?”

Hayasaka: “...No. There’s actually a lot more he got drunk on.”

VODKA BOTTLES

Hayasaka: “Don’t you remember all the alcohol we found in Bojack’s room? It’s safe to assume he was most likely drinking throughout the day regardless.”

Jesse: “...Guess I can’t argue there.”

L: “It’s not impossible to assume Bojack was intoxicated at the time based on the evidence alone. With his senses lowered, he would be prone to accidents no matter how avoidable they may be.”

Latte: “Oh dear. Then, what do you think it could’ve been caused by?”

Kurumada: “You said the beer bottle was broken, right Hayasaka? Bojack could’a dropped it and then slipped on the glass.”

Brian: “He dropped the bottle… then slipped on it?”

Kurumada: “I dunno! Got any other bright ideas, string bean?”

Brian: “S-String bean?!”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, ah, I don’t think that would be possible. It’s more likely that Bojack entered the database with the bottle in hand, and once slipping, the bottle would’ve smashed after he fell over.”

Latte: “So if it wasn’t the bottle, perhaps there was a hazard in the database? Everything in there did look a bit overwhelming.”

Natsuki: “The only hazard I could see was going crazy over all the information.”

L: “If you call that a hazard, then perhaps I have lost my mind.”

Saiki: “ *That already happened before the database* .”

Hayasaka: (“Was there anything potentially dangerous in the database without being aware of your surroundings? Ah, maybe there was…”) “Kurumada… You know, don’t you?”

Kurumada: “I do?”

Hayasaka: “When we were first investigating the database, haha…”

Kurumada: “Uh, you’re not talkin’ about when we found those files and you–”

Hayasaka: “N-No! Something… Something else.”

Kurumada: “Uh, shit, I dunno… Oh, ya mean the wires? I remember havin’ to step over a bunch. Damn things were lying just about anywhere.”

Latte: “But if Bojack was drunk, he wouldn’t have noticed the wires, would he?”

Natsuki: “He must’ve tripped on one which made him hit his head!”

Jesse: “What the hell, man? That’s not fair!”

Monotora: “The Nesos company is not liable for any accidents caused under the influence of alcohol!”

Jesse: “Shut the fuck up!”

Brian: “But you were the ones who provided alcohol in the first place…”

Monotora: “We never said you had to drink any, eh? Just ‘cuz we give you food, beds n’ bathrooms, doesn’t mean you gotta use ‘em either!”

Brian: “B-But we do?”

L: “Back to the case, I believe we have a foundation for the order of events regarding Bojack’s death.”

Kurumada: “Bojack got drunk, went to the database for kicks – or whatever reason – tripped over a wire n’ hit his head on the cabinet. At least we’re gettin’ somewhere with this.”

Latte: “Hang on a moment, I have a small question. Why would Bojack want to get drunk in the first place?”

Jesse: “Have you met the guy?”

Hayasaka: “Forgive me if I’m wrong, but I have a feeling it was due to the motive. For someone like Bojack, alcohol would’ve been an easy escape from the hallucinations.”

Brian: “Or the hallucinations could’ve even convinced him to drink, huh?”

Natsuki: “Now that you mention it, I did hear him once complain about how his scotch wasn’t strong enough to ‘stop the voices’, whatever that meant.”

Saiki: “ *How dramatic* .”

L: “Either way, the idea plays out the same. This motive must’ve had a factor in increasing Bojack’s already heavy use of alcohol.”

Jesse: “We ain’t done yet, detective emo. Sure, Bojack hits his head. But what the hell is his body doin’ by the servers?”

L: “I never said we were finished. Also, I don’t believe I’ve ever been granted such a… unique nickname before.”

Kurumada: “If we’re goin’ off the idea that he was dragged over there, then what’s stoppin’ Brian from doing it?”

Brian: “W-Why’re you pinning it back on me?”

Kurumada: “‘Cuz you were the only other person to ever step foot into the database last night according to you!”

Hayasaka: “That still wouldn’t be possible. If Brian had dragged Bojack, he most likely would’ve gotten blood on him. But as L confirmed before, he was clean when he went back to the VR facility.”

L: “And I have little faith to believe Brian has any sort of capability in transporting someone like Bojack on his own, regardless.”

Brian: “See? I–W-Wait what? I-I mean, I guess you’re right, but…”

Natsuki: “So if it wasn’t him, then who dragged Bojack and why?”

Jesse: “I’ll tell you why, ‘cuz this ain’t no accident. You really think Bojack would die so easily from jack?”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...I won’t comment on the face Saiki’s making.”)

Latte: “But could there be someone else involved after all? With the building locked, I thought it had become unlikely.”

L: “Fortunately, we are not stumped on clues. I propose we backtrack to Brian’s account and solve the mysteries behind the anomalies. That way, a new path may make itself clear on whether or not a culprit was behind this case.”

Hayasaka: (“Brian’s story holds some strange things… It’s best we figure out how they all tie to the case.”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Latte: “Brian, would you be a dear and summarise what happened again?”

Brian: “Oh, s-sure… So, not long after arriving at the database, the lights all went out.”

Kurumada: “D’ya think someone switched ‘em off?”

Brian: “Actually, the servers and monitors turned off too, so I think it was a blackout.”

Kurumada: “Well ya should’ve mentioned that in the first place!”

Brian: “B-But I did earlier?”

Natsuki: “Did someone **trip the breaker** or something?”

Jesse: “There was a lotta shit running at the time. It probably couldn’t handle it all n’ said fuck it.”

L: “I highly doubt an entire building dedicated to running server-based equipment would not be suited to handle large power levels.”

Hayasaka: (“Thankfully, the answer here is rather simple.”)

DAMAGED CIRCUIT BREAKER

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

Hayasaka: “I believe Natsuki’s right. The circuit breaker must’ve had a hand in causing the blackout. However, I don’t think it was simply turned off. When we looked over it earlier, it was damaged.”

Natsuki: “Damaged? Did someone mess around with the wires?”

Brian: “None of the wires looked to be tampered with when I checked it out, though.”

Latte: “Oh! Maybe it had something to do with that beer smell?”

Kurumada: “Beer smell?”

Latte: “It was coming from inside the circuit breaker. Now that I think about it, what if someone had poured beer over it to break it? I’m not savvy with tech, but even I’ve broken a few inventions made by other cookies by accidently spilling my latte onto them.”

Saiki: “ *Now you’ve just admitted to property damage* .”

L: “As we’ve already established the presence of alcohol within the database, it isn’t unlikely to say exposing the circuit breaker to liquid had caused a power surge.”

Kurumada: “Well that’s one mystery solved. What’s next?”

Natsuki: “I think it was the smashing sound that made Brian run out of the database.”

Brian: “Ah, yep. B-But you didn’t have to mention the last part again, did you?”

Jesse: “That’s an easy one. It must’a been when the beer bottle was smashed earlier.”

Hayasaka: “I’m not sure if that’s likely. If that was the case, then Brian would’ve heard Bojack hitting his head around the same time.”

Latte: “Could something else have been smashed?”

Hayasaka: (“Was there anything else in the database that could fit the description? Yes, in fact there was.”)

BROKEN MONITOR

Hayasaka: “At the back of the database, we found a monitor with its screen smashed. I believe the sound of it breaking would’ve lined up with what Brian had heard.”

Jesse: “But how’d it even get smashed in? Monitors don’t just magically break, y’know?”

Hayasaka: (“He is right. But, I have a feeling I already know how it was done…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

L: “In order to deliberately break a screen, you’d require a big enough impact to cause damage.”

Saiki: “ *Then it was probably* ***broken with another object*** .”

Natsuki: “Is just punching the screen out of the question?”

Kurumada: “Oh, great. Back to suspectin’ me again eh?”

Natsuki: “N-No! I’ve just, y’know, had some pretty ragey moments while playing video games…”

Jesse: “Didn’t know you were a gamer, Nat.”

Natsuki: “J-Jeeze, don’t call me that. I hate the connotations.”

Brian: “Does being a gamer have, um, bad connotations?”

Natsuki: “As long as you’re online gaming…”

Hayasaka: (“Quite an odd detour there, haha. Um, anyway…”)

BROKEN TABLET

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I have to agree with Saiki. You must be referring to the tablet we found, right?”

Saiki: “ *It was right next to the monitor. It really wasn’t trying to hide itself* .”

Kurumada: “What’dya mean tablet? Ya mean like the ones we have?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, yes. But, this tablet’s screen was also broken like the monitor’s. If the two were smashed into each other, it explains why they’re both broken.”

Natsuki: “Hey, doesn’t that mean whoevers tablet that was is the one who smashed the monitor in the first place?”

Jesse: “It–It does? Then, hey! Everyone, get out your tablet! See–I’ve got mine right here!”

Kurumada: “Hold on, what’s this for?”

Jesse: “Obviously whoever doesn’t have their tablet’s gotta be the one who smashed it, dumbass!”

Latte: “Are we sure? What if it was a tablet stolen from someone who’s passed?”

Monotora: “Naw, that ain’t possible. All previous victims' tablets have been taken back into Nesos’ custody. As for any killers’? Well, their executions surely took care of ‘em! Gahaha!”

Brian: “A-Actually, um, I don’t think we need to waste time showing our tablets. We already know who it belonged to, right?”

Natsuki: “Eh? Who?”

Brian: “Bojack. After all, his tablet was missing when we checked his body.”

L: “Therefore, this leads us to two possibilities. Either Bojack was the one to break the monitor, or a third party had stolen his tablet off his person.”

Hayasaka: “I…I believe that concludes everything about Brian’s story. Firstly, a blackout was caused by pouring beer over the circuit breaker. Then, a monitor was smashed using Bojack’s tablet, essentially destroying both.”

Kurumada: “All for what, exactly?”

Hayasaka: “Um, w-well…”

Kurumada: “It ain’t your fault, Hayasaka. Clearly, some crafty bastard’s been havin’ you on.”

Brian: “Huh? Who would that be?”

Kurumada: “ *You* , asshole!”

Brian: “W-W-What?!”

Kurumada: “Blackouts? Smashing fuckin’ monitors? Is this shit a joke to ya?! Our lives are on the line here!”

Brian: “I-I know that! But I don’t know what else you want me to say!”

Kurumada: “How about you start with the damn truth for once? All this shit has nothin’ to do with Bojack dyin’, so what gives? Ya make all this up to hide something?”

Brian: “N-No! I really don’t know why any of that happened!”

Jesse: “I dunno, yo. Why would anyone need to do all that shit? It feels kinda weird to me.”

Hayasaka: “There–There must be a reason why someone had caused all of that…”

Kurumada: “Yeah, to give us a damn wild goose chase so he could cover his crime!”

Brian: “Why’re you so insistent that I’m the killer…?!”

Hayasaka: “H-Hang on, you two don’t need to fight–”

Kurumada: “I ain’t sayin’ nothing that ain’t the truth! There’s no reason any of this shit had to happen unless *you* were fuckin’ around!”

Brian: “Ah, I should’ve never gone to the database in the first place!”

Hayasaka: (“Goodness, this is bad. I know Kurumada and Brian have their moments, but this is getting out of hand. While Kurumada has a point, I just can’t see how Brian could be the killer in this situation. In that case… What if I tried to calm them down while getting us an answer? It’s risky, but I’ll have to try.”)

BALANCE BATTLE

Kurumada: “There ain’t no reason why the lights had to shut off!”

Brian: “If I was the killer, why would I need to turn the lights off?”

AFFIRM BRIAN

Hayasaka: “Ah, that’s right! If Brian had just walked in, it would’ve been bad if he had seen Bojack’s body, or the killer themselves. Turning off the light must’ve been so Brian wouldn’t have been able to see anyone.”

Kurumada: “But breaking the monitor still doesn’t make sense! It’s not like it happened just ‘cuz Brian was there!”

Brian: “I-I really thought I was going to be attacked when I heard that smashing noise!”

DENY KURUMADA

Hayasaka: “Actually, what if the sole reason for breaking the monitor and causing the noise *was* to make Brian leave? Surely, an unprecedented noise like that would scare anyone away…”

Kurumada: “So this whole thing was just a damn distraction to get him out?”

Brian: “Are you sure that would’ve worked? If L had gone instead, wouldn’t he have tried to investigate the noise?”

DENY BRIAN

Hayasaka: “No, I believe the culprit must’ve known it was you who arrived. That’s why they had attempted the distraction to begin with…”

Kurumada: “But anyone could’a figured that about him! It doesn’t help cut down any suspects.”

Brian: “D-Does everyone really know I’m easily scared?”

AFFIRM KURUMADA

Hayasaka: “You have a point. However, it *does* lift suspicion off of Brian. If he was the one the culprit was trying to stop from witnessing the murder, he can’t be the culprit.”

BREAK

Natsuki: “Wait, so that entire thing was just to get Brian out of the database?”

L: “The culprit must’ve witnessed Brian enter the database not long after Bojack had hit his head. In the short time they possessed before Brian could potentially stumble upon anything against their favour, they had to act fast knowing what could convince him to leave.”

Brian: “So that means I can’t be the killer, o-okay?”

Kurumada: “...Guess ya ain’t. Damnit! And here I thought I was on a roll after gettin’ that other shit right!”

Saiki: “ *I told you not to let it get to your head* .”

Latte: “I think an apology is due for poor Brian after accusing him so much!”

Kurumada: “Why do I–? *Fine* . Sorry, or whatever…”

Brian: “It’s alright… We should just move on now.”

Hayasaka: “Y-Yes… I think we should do that.” (“I think I managed to calm them down, at least…”)

Jesse: “So how do we find out who did all that shit when Brian said he never saw anyone leave the database anyway?”

L: “We should not concern ourselves with who for now. After all, there’s still one final mystery pertaining to Brian’s story: that being of the locked front entrance.”

Latte: “How long were you waiting outside before checking the front entrance, Brian?”

Brian: “Well, it only had to be a couple minutes…”

Natsuki: “That’s gotta mean the killer locked it from the inside. Hey! What if it was Monotora? We saw them use that ‘master key’ thing during the investigation, didn’t we?”

Jesse: “Shit, you’re right. Hell, it could’a been someone workin’ with Nesos – they’d probably give them a ton of perks or whatever.”

Monotora: “Kehehe, what wild imaginations! Oi, lemme spell it out real simple for ya: I can’t be directly involved with a murder case! As much as I’d love to rip a nice scratch across ya gut n’ let all ya intestines fly loose, it won’t cut it for Nesos’ trials!”

Natsuki: “Okay, we get it! You didn’t need to hit us with such a disgusting visual!”

L: “Brian, what exactly did you test to find the front entrance was locked?”

Brian: “Um, I just tried the handle.”

L: “And did it push all the way down?”

Brian: “Mm… Yep.”

L: “Then it wasn’t locked. Merely, it was blocked by something.”

Latte: “Oh my! I didn’t even think to ask such a thing.”

Kurumada: “So what was blockin’ it?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, it might’ve been *that* , surely…”)

KNOCKED OVER CABINET

Hayasaka: “Closeby to the front entrance, we found a small cabinet that had been knocked over. That would’ve been able to fit underneath the handle while being easily movable, right?”

Kurumada: “Y’know what? That explains why I heard no lock break when I broke down the door earlier. If it was just a cabinet, heh, well no wonder it was so easy to break in.”

Saiki: “ *That also explains the thudding sound we heard instead.”*

Latte: “Looks like all of Brian’s story has been solved, hum? The killer caused a blackout and broke the monitor to lure Brian out of the database, and then locked themselves up with a cabinet so he couldn’t come back inside.”

Saiki: “ *Locked themselves up* ?”

Jesse: “Yeah, that doesn’t make any sense, yo. If the database was locked until it was broken into this morning, doesn’t that mean the killer was stuck there, like, the entire night?”

Kurumada: “What’s wrong with that? If they waited there the whole night, they could’a just rejoined everyone once we all found Bojack.”

Hayasaka: “No… I don’t think that was possible. After we arrived at the database with Brian, Saiki and L, everyone else had appeared from the front entrance after the announcement.”

L: “And as we had searched the entire database for anything prior to the knowledge of Bojack ever being inside, one of us would’ve surely caught anyone hiding.”

Natsuki: “Who would even want to spend the entire night next to a corpse, anyway?”

Kurumada: “Then how the hell do you explain the killer lockin’ themselves in and never bein’ caught?”

Jesse: “‘Cuz there was only ever *one* person in the database that night after it was locked.”

Brian: “Huh? What do you mean?”

Jesse: “Look, you’ve all been overcomplicatin’ this shit from the start. Don’t you guys get it? It was Bojack. *He* was the one who did this.”

Natsuki: “Bojack did it…? But, didn’t we agree it wasn’t an accident, Jesse?”

Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: “But, Jesse, I don’t understand… Would that have even been possible? Bojack died at 2A.M., the same time Brian entered the database. How could he have caused the blackout and locked the database when he was already dead?”

Jesse: “Listen to yourself – you’re bein’ way too specific. Brian only ever said he arrived at the database *around* 2A.M. He could’a been some time just before 2, y’know?”

Brian: “That… that is right. I didn’t pay much attention to the exact time last night. I didn’t think it mattered…”

Hayasaka: “Oh…”

Natsuki: “But Jesse, what… what’re you trying to say here?”

Jesse: “Look, just, hear me out? Okay?”

Latte: “Go on, dear. We’re all ears.”

Jesse: “...Bojack hits his head on the cabinet, yeah? And at that moment, Brian walks in. Bojack then causes the blackout, smashes the monitor with his own tablet to scare Brian away, n’ pushes a cabinet up to the door so no one can come back in.”

Saiki: “ *But wouldn’t Bojack just have died immediately after being hit* ?”

Hayasaka: “A-Actually, it’s uncertain if he did or not, due to his height, weight and other such factors…”

Kurumada: “So what’re you sayin’ happened next?”

Jesse: “With his last remaining strength, Bojack sat down by the servers… n’ gave in to his injury.”

Latte: “That’s… just terrible. Oh, why would he do that?”

L: “Exactly. Why *would* he do that, Jesse?”

Jesse: “Wha? The hell is it now? What’s wrong with what I said?”

Hayasaka: (“Although there’s nothing impossible about it, there’s something he’s forgetting.”)
“You’re talking about Brian, right? If Bojack’s death was an accident, why would he go the extra mile to do all of that to him?”

Saiki: " *If anything, he should've called out for help, not scare him off and lock the door. That would just block him from any aid* ."

Monotora: "Who wouldn't wanna play one last prank on Brian, eh? It'd sure give me a good laugh before I die!"

Brian: "H-Hey!"

Jesse: "You're all doing it again. Overlooking the obvious. Bojack's death… it wasn't an accident. It… It was a suicide."

Kurumada: "A suicide?!"

Natsuki: "H-Hang on, are you serious?"

Jesse: "Yeah. Just… c'mon, think about it. He didn't want anyone to see him. He didn't want anyone to find out he had taken his own life. He didn't… *fuck* …"

Natsuki: "Jesse… Hey, it's okay–"

Jesse: "No, yo! We should'a seen this comin' from the start! It must'a been the hallucinations, or the stress of the death game gettin' to him, or Retsuko, or-or fuck! Damn bastard… Why couldn't he just have said somethin' to me…?"

Latte: "Oh, Jesse… None of this is your fault, okay?"

Jesse: "..."

Hayasaka: ("Bojack… wanted to take his own life? It's not in my right to say if he was contemplating or not, but… Even Jesse doesn't want to believe it. His voice is strained. He doesn't want to say it. He… *Hang on* …")

Brian: “Um… I’m sorry if this question is in poor taste – I-I really don’t mean anything bad by it – but, why wouldn’t Bojack want us to find him?”

Jesse: “It’s not our deal. It’s just what he wanted.”

L: “In fact, Jesse, it is within our right to know. He had to let us find him, or else in the case we could not figure out he had taken his own life, we would’ve all died here in the trial.”

Kurumada: “Unless ya try’na say he was planning to take us all down with him.”

Jesse: “I ain’t, asshole! I just – you know – no one’s gonna ever know why he did it, so just lay off, alright?!”

Hayasaka: “...But it wasn’t possible, was it?”

Jesse: “...What?”

Latte: “What wasn’t possible? The suicide?”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t know. But, there is something about Jesse’s theory that doesn’t make sense. Jesse, you said Bojack used his remaining strength to walk to the servers, right?”

Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: “Thinking about how much ground Bojack had to have covered around the database before this… There’s something missing.”

TRAIL OF BLOOD

Hayasaka: “There’s no blood. The only blood we ever found was from the cabinet to the servers.”

Jesse: “And? The cabinet was where he was hit, and the servers was where he died.”

L: “You’re conveniently forgetting elsewhere Bojack had supposedly travelled in the database between those two locations. From what we know, he had to have gone from the cabinet, the circuit breaker, the monitors, the front entrance, and finally to the servers.”

Kurumada: “A whole lotta walkin’ for a supposedly dying guy.”

Saiki: “ *But no blood in any of those places in between* .”

Jesse: “...”

L: “We have no reason to stop there, either. If Bojack was the one to expose alcohol to the circuit breaker, where exactly did he retrieve it from?”

Natsuki: “He was literally holding a bottle of beer, remember?”

Brian: “But didn’t we say the bottle had smashed when Bojack hit his head? He wouldn’t be able to use it at that point.”

Monotora: “Ol’ Bobo’s a horse, ain’t he? Kehe, maybe he slurped it up from the floor and spat into the breaker like a trough!”

Brian: “N-No one was thinking that, actually!”

Saiki: “ *Stay out of our conversation* .”

Latte: “But we know beer was used on the breaker, no doubt.”

Hayasaka: “I’m not denying that. However, there’s a chance… there was *more* alcohol at the database last night than what we know of now.”

Kurumada: “More, eh? Wouldn’t put it past Bojack to pocket a ton.”

Jesse: “Are you even hearin’ yourself right now? If Bojack had any more beer, then why the hell didn’t we find any?”

L: “Simple. Someone must’ve been present at the time to dispose of it.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so now you’re saying there *was* someone else at the database?!”

L: “Yes. And for someone to have consciously removed evidence from the scene of the crime means they didn’t want us to find it.”

Hayasaka: “Then, are you saying there is a chance that there is a killer involved–”

Jesse: “Bullshit!”

Kurumada: “What’s bullshit?!”

Jesse: “All–All of this! Missin’ blood, stolen beer – who gives a shit?! You’re all makin’ up lies ‘cuz you don’t think a guy like Bojack would kill himself!”

Brian: “W-We’re not! It’s just a bit strange, right? Some of this just doesn’t make sense if Bojack was alone.”

Saiki: “ *It doesn’t make sense at all. Someone had to be there with him* .”

Natsuki: “Why do you all think you know any better than him? *Jesse* knew Bojack the best. They were friends, I even saw it first hand. If he’s even suggesting the idea of a suicide, he’s being completely serious about this. Can’t you see how much this is affecting him?”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “If he’s saying that’s what happened, then why can’t you just trust him?”

Hayasaka: (“Trust him…?”)

Latte: “Ah… I really don’t want to doubt Jesse. Maybe there is a way to explain away those discrepancies?”

L: “That would prove quite the challenge.”

Jesse: “Fuck you!”

Kurumada: “Oi! Why’re you getting so damn pressed at us?! If ya keep arguing, we just gonna be stuck in some fuckin’ split–”

Monotora: “Split? *Split* ?! I’ll split ya damn bones apart while I tear you up between my teeth!”

Kurumada: “What the–?! Damn animal…”

Monotora: “Kehehe! Did I spook ya? I love when shit starts gettin’ interesting again. Y’have any idea how pissed I was earlier, thinkin’ you were all working together *too* well? Heh, let’s just say seein’ things back to normal is such a relief. So much so that I’ll personally promote you all to a good ol’ round of the scrum debate!”

Brian: “Oh god, not another one…”

Monotora: “How dare you bring that sort of attitude to work, Brian! Your ass is getting demoted instead!”

Brian: “W-What?”

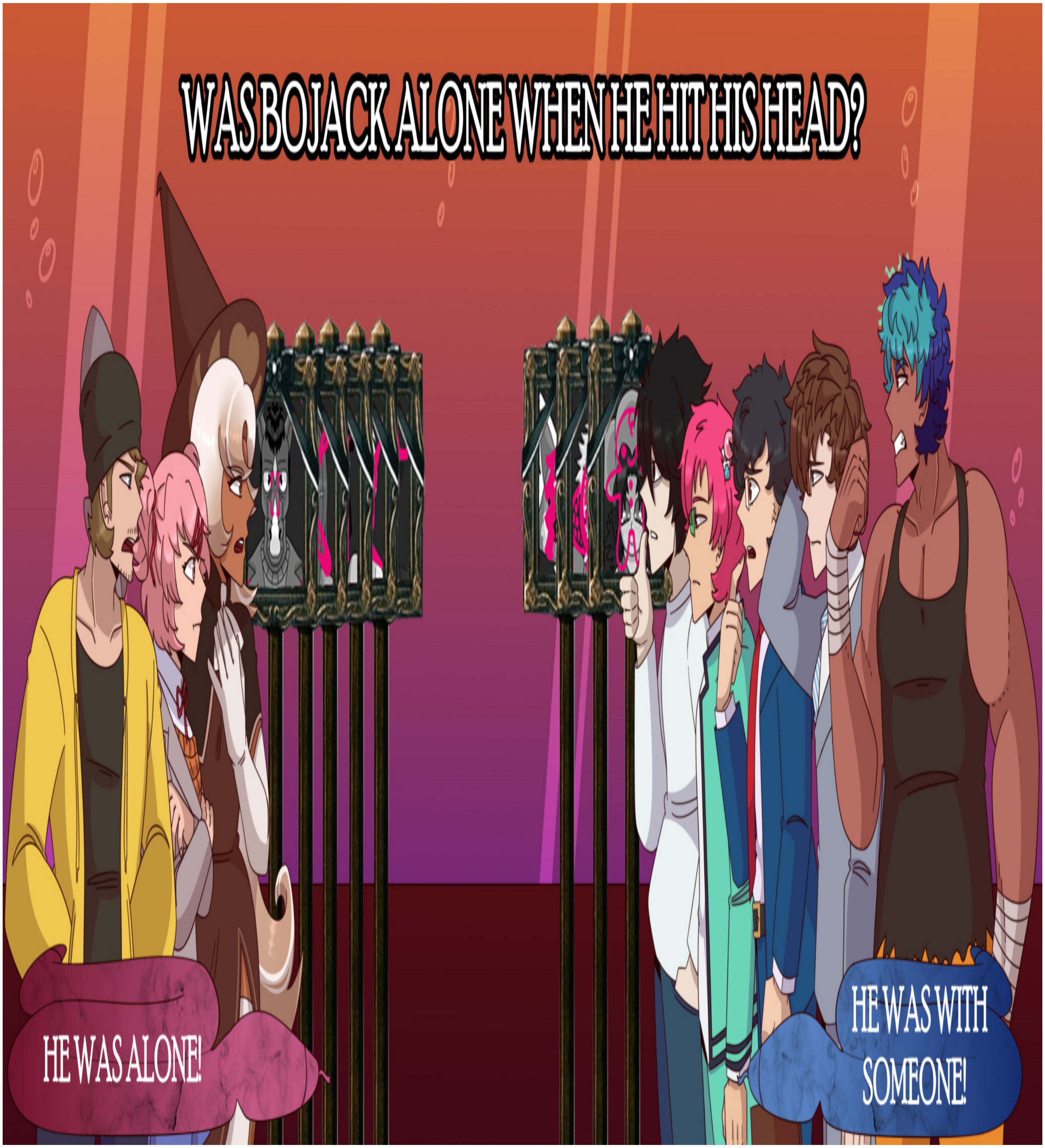
Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Why is Jesse so insistent we should accept his theory despite its holes? Accepting any fate for Bojack must be hard for him, but surely someone like him would want to at least check the idea of a killer, right? Ah, no, what’s important is that we need to agree on whether or not there was someone present with Bojack in the locked database. If so, then… I fear something else is true, too.”)

SPLIT OPINION

-WAS BOJACK ALONE WHEN HE HIT HIS HEAD?-

DEBATE SCRUM START


WAS BOJACK ALONE WHEN HE HIT HIS HEAD?
HE WAS ALONE!
HE WAS WITH SOMEONE!

Jesse: “So you still don’t think Bojack committed **suicide** even after what I said?”

L: “Considering how Bojack hit his head, such a method could hardly be classified as **suicide** .”

Latte: “Wouldn’t it have been possible for Bojack to have covered his injury while walking around the database to prevent any **blood** from being spilled?”

Saiki: “ *That still doesn’t explain the clean* ***blood*** *trail from the cabinet to the servers.* ”

Natsuki: “But if someone else was there, then why did they get rid of the **alcohol** ? Wouldn’t it be better to keep it there to make it look like Bojack used it?”

L: “By keeping the **alcohol** present, we would have realised that Bojack was not alone, perhaps a sign he was sharing it with someone.”

Natsuki: “But the only possible person that could’ve been is **Brian** ! He was the only other person we know for sure went to the database last night.”

Brian: “But it couldn’t have been **Brian** –! Erm, I-I mean me. After all, I was locked out of the database by someone else.”

Latte: “Then how could it be that anyone else managed to **escape** the database with the alcohol if they were locked in from the inside?”

Kurumada: “Surely there’s more than just the front entrance they could’a **escaped** from! Some of these killers’ve been real creative.”

Jesse: “Don’t say that! Don’t say killer! Who the fuck would’a wanted to **kill** Bojack?!”

Hayasaka: “There is a possibility someone did **kill** Bojack, whether you accept it or not…”

CROUCH BIND

HE WAS WITH SOMEONE :

“This is our answer!”

FULL
COUNTER

BREAK

Jesse: “Whether I accept it or not…?”

Hayasaka: “What makes you so hesitant to believe it, Jesse?”

Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...I see.”)

Latte: “Actually, I understand where Hayasaka’s coming from. We have to stay open minded during a trial, don’t we? As much as you don’t want to hear any sort of deflection towards your idea, as much as you try to block it out, it stops you from seeing the bigger picture. Jesse, your ideas may not be wrong, but wouldn’t it be helpful if we build on from each other instead?”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “When you word it like that… I-I guess that makes more sense. I mean, you guys managed to figure out I was the one who poisoned Ena, and… were technically the same people to save me from being killed, too.”

Saiki: “ *You’re welcome* .”

Natsuki: “Wow, jerk! I’m just trying to say that even though I should trust you guys, I don’t want to disagree with Jesse, either. I still believe he knows more about Bojack than we do.”

Brian: “I don’t disagree with that, either. I think it’s good you want to help him! W-We weren’t trying to be malicious when arguing – it’s just what we have to do.”

Kurumada: “Well maybe Mr. Detective is, heh.”

L: “I won’t be commenting on that claim. However, I will say it should be agreed upon now that Bojack hitting his head was not an accident on his behalf, nor a suicide attempt.”

Latte: “Then, would this be a murder?”

Natsuki: “Who could the killer even be? Are you saying we’ve gotta go all the way back to the idea of Kurumada pushing Bojack into the cabinet?”

Kurumada: “Hey! Don’t start that shit again!”

Hayasaka: “...No, I believe we already know who the killer is.”

Natsuki: “We–We *do* ?”

Brian: “Who do you think it is, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“...I didn’t want to say it. Of course I didn’t want to be the one to say it. Who would? But, I can’t shake the feeling I’ve had for a while now. Someone who so far has been so insistent with their theory. How they answered my question… It solidified my fears. And I can’t overlook that anymore.”)

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “...Jesse, you’re the killer, aren’t you?”

Jesse: “W-Wha… What?”

Natsuki: “ *Jesse* ? Hang on, are you being serious?!”

Latte: “No, that can’t be! For Jesse to be the killer, it’s…”

Natsuki: “It’s stupid! Did you seriously forget what I said before?”

Jesse: “...Yeah, like, what? *What* ? Me? You’re sayin’ I killed Bojack? Why? *Why* ?! Why are you, outta all people, gonna suspect me of killing Bojack?!”

Hayasaka: “J-Jesse, that is… I just don’t understand how for someone so close to Bojack, your theories have all been so… off putting. It’s almost as if you’re trying to hide something here.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, Hayasaka’s got a point there. Hey, weren’t you the one who told him to lead the investigation for Bojack’s ‘murder’, too?”

Brian: “Ah, that’s right. I remember him saying that…”

FLASHBACK

Jesse: “Mr. Hayasaka, could you, uh, could you lead the investigation for the murder, or–or whatever…?”

Hayasaka: “M…Me?”

FLASHBACK END

Jesse: “So what? I was just sayin’ shit – is that what you call evidence now?”

L: “It’s not because of what you said, but how you said it. You specifically worded it as a murder, so for you to have a change of heart during the trial and claim for Bojack’s case as a suicide is strange, is it not?”

Jesse: “Like hell it is! You can’t–you can’t just suspect me of *anything* for the same shit no one else here can be called out on!”

Kurumada: “What’re you talking about?”

Jesse: “The fucking locked database, dipshit! You said no one was found in the database in the morning apart from Bojack, yeah? Then, then, how do you explain me ever bein’ there to begin with?! Huh?! What, did I just teleport outta there? You must be higher than a fuckin’ dopehead to believe that jack…!”

Natsuki: “Jesse?”

Kurumada: “Damn asshole… Then would ya like us to figure that out for ya? Since all you seem to enjoy doin’ is playin’ creative with ya damn mouth.”

Hayasaka: (“This isn’t good. I didn’t think Jesse would become so hostile so quickly. I know he acted rather similar to when he was suspected of killing Walter, but this feels… different. I can’t put my finger on why right now, but he is right. We need to figure out how the killer escaped from the locked database if we’re ever going to press on further…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Kurumada: “There’s gotta be a way outta a locked room… Oi, what if he just unlocked it, left, n’ locked it from the outside again?”

L: “Not possible. As we have established before, a cabinet was used to lock the door. Jesse would not have been capable of moving such an object back in front of the door from the outside.”

Latte: “And I really don’t think he was in possession of coffee magic to do so!”

Kurumada: “Uh, yeah. Whatever that means…”

Saiki: “ *Maybe he used another place to escape that wasn’t the front entrance* .”

Brian: “Oh, what if he used the vents? I noticed there were a few beside the servers to keep them from overheating.”

Jesse: “That ain’t possible, man! None of ‘em were found tampered with, or whatever, and it’s not like I would’a had a damn screwdriver on me!”

Natsuki: “Wait, Jesse… how would you know that? You didn’t investigate the database earlier–”

Jesse: “Look, as much as you argue over it, there ain’t any other place to leave the database, okay?! **Every possible option was closed off** , and you all know it! Just drop this damn accusation already!”

Hayasaka: (“...There may be one possibility on how he was able to escape, and I’m glad I checked it out when I did.”)

ROOF WINDOW

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “In fact, Jesse, I believe there *was* somewhere to escape the database from – the roof windows.”

Natsuki: “Eh? I didn’t know there were roof windows.”

Brian: “It was basically our only light source while we were looking around, h-heheh. We actually spotted one that was open, too.”

Kurumada: “Apparently a whole person can fit onto the roof through it, right Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, yes. After an, um, e-experiment of sorts…”

Saiki: “ *Why do I have the feeling I don’t want to know what happened* ?”

Hayasaka: (“You don’t…”)

L: “Rather suspicious, isn’t it? Especially considering the windows can only be opened from the inside, if one were to exit the database through it, it has the unfortunate downside of leaving behind a clear indication of its use. But for Jesse, who most likely did not have a lot of options once he had locked the door–”

Jesse: “Whoa, hey, hey, hey! What the fuck?! Why’re you speaking like you’re for sure I did it now?! I still ain’t buyin’ it, y’know!”

L: “...Well now, I wouldn’t interrupt you now, would I?”

Brian: “Wow, you hold back your anger well. A-At least I think you’re angry…?”

Latte: “Huh? What’s wrong with what they said, Jesse?”

Jesse: “It’s in the name: *roof* windows – they’re on the damn roof for crying out loud! How the hell do you expect anyone to get up there to reach ‘em?!”

Brian: “Well, you could… Um…”

Kurumada: “…Anyone know if there was a ladder in there or somethin’?”

Saiki: “ *Looks like this problem needs more thought* .”

Hayasaka: ("We know it's possible for a person to fit through onto the roof through those windows, and that one being left open like that proves the possibility someone *did* use it, but… How? I don't think we have any more physical evidence to present to make sense of it.")

Natsuki: "...Was there anything special about that window?"

Hayasaka: "Huh?"

Jesse: "No, I told you, it's impossible to get to."

Natsuki: "And how do *you* know that, Jesse?"

Jesse: "What…?"

Kurumada: "Now that ya mention it, I got a few ideas now."

L: "You never lack the mentality to press on, do you?"

Kurumada: "I don't exactly know what you're tryin' to get at, but at least I know I ain't givin' up 'til we figure this out! Even if I gotta think of a million wrong things to get there, alright?"

Latte: "Me too! I want to contribute as much as I can – when there's a will, there's a way."

Hayasaka: ("...Perhaps that's it. What if I just simply *listen* to what everyone else thinks? Even if I don't have the evidence to refute or agree, with enough simple logic, someone might be able to help further the discussion to an answer. I'm not alone here with this, am I…?")

BEACHSIDE BRAINSTORM

>>[VIDEO: BEACHSIDE BRAINSTORM]<<

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Ah… I see now. Bojack was the direct reason *how* you were able to escape from the window, Jesse. You must’ve used him as a boost up onto the server right above the window, allowing you to reach it and escape the locked database.”

Natsuki: “He… used Bojack like a stepping stool?”

Jesse: “...”

Kurumada: “Hey, doesn’t that finally give us a reason as to why Bojack was even dragged over to the damn servers in the first place?”

L: “I must say, Jesse was rather lucky to possess such a deep-pocketed hoodie in order to allow him to transport whatever intact alcohol was in the database at the time, leaving no qualms for multiple trips.”

Jesse: “So… So what?! That still doesn’t mean *I’m* the killer, according to your fucking fantasy! You said–you said before, yeah, that Bojack’s death wasn’t an accident, or a suicide. But it couldn’t be a murder either! Bojack definitely hit his head on that cabinet – you even said he slipped on his own for cryin’ out loud!”

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “Uh, shit, I dunno… Oh, ya mean the wires? I remember havin’ to step over a bunch. Damn things were lying just about anywhere.”

Latte: “But if Bojack was drunk, he wouldn’t have noticed the wires, would he?”

Natsuki: “He must’ve tripped on one which made him hit his head!”

FLASHBACK END

Latte: “We did conclude that, didn’t we?”

Saiki: “ *That was only when we assumed Bojack was alone, though.* ”

Hayasaka: (“If we believe the idea that Jesse was there also, that means there’s a chance there’s more to how Bojack died than we initially thought…”)

Jesse: “Well it wasn’t like I went n’ pushed him or whatever! Even if Bojack was drunk, the dude’s way too heavy to push back!”

Brian: “That is true. Although, that theory only really applied to Kurumada, anyway.”

Kurumada: “Don’t get cocky, stringbean.”

Brian: “A-Again…?”

L: “Just because you did not directly use physical means, doesn’t mean you couldn’t have caused Bojack to trip.”

Natsuki: “But that’s… how else could he have done it?”

Latte: “What if he was the one to get Bojack drunk in the first place?”

Jesse: “The only person you can pin gettin’ Bojack to drink is Bojack himself.”

L: “...There may have been an object that has been wrongly identified thus far on how we believe the case played out.”

Kurumada: “Great riddle there, like that’s gonna help anyone out…”

Hayasaka: (“Something we wrongly identified?”) “Wait… are you referring to the beer bottle?”

L: “And what about it?”

Brian: “When we thought Bojack was alone, the bottle had smashed because he was holding it at the time he fell. I don’t understand how that would change if Jesse was there.”

L: “And when did you decide Bojack was holding that bottle definitively?”

Brian: “Because, erm…”

L: “Don’t worry, Brian. If I recall, it was in fact Kurumada who initially proposed such a scenario.”

Kurumada: “What?! How the hell d’ya even remember that?! But still, it makes sense, don’t it? Unless you’re tryn’a say Jesse smashed it over his head or some dumbass shit like that!”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada… That actually might be it.”

Kurumada: “It is?!”

Jesse: “Wait, what?”

Hayasaka: “By smashing the bottle over his head, is it too much of a stretch to say the impact caused Bojack to stumble backwards and trip over the wire…?”

Natsuki: “That…”

Jesse: “Oh, c’mon, why the hell would I hit Bojack in the first place?! You don’t believe that, right Nat?”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “Nat?”

Natsuki: “...What if the two were fighting?”

Jesse: “Nat?!”

Latte: “Fighting? I suppose the two have had their quarrels…”

L: “It’s certainly plausible. After all, if Bojack was intoxicated at the time, and surrounded by alcohol, it’s much more likely Jesse was as well. Fueled by alcohol, one is more prone to make more irrational decisions.”

Brian: “That I can vouch for… S-Somewhat.”

Jesse: “Are you seriously trying to claim we had a bar fight in the database of all places?! I’d like to see some fucking evidence for that bull.”

Hayasaka: (“ *Ah* , hang on… Bar fight? That reminds me of something someone else said during the investigation…”)

BOJACK’S RUFFED-UP APPEARANCE

Hayasaka: “Contrary to his usual appearance, we found Bojack looking rather messy. I very vividly remember how Kurumada compared his looks to someone in a bar fight.”

Kurumada: “Looked like he had insulted the opposin’ team and riled up a bunch’a thugs on the other side of the bar.”

Saiki: “ *It feels like you’re speaking from experience here.* ”

Latte: “But for him to end up in such a state means he was doing something very physical. I’ve definitely had to spend a lot of time ironing my dress and brushing my hair after some very nasty fights myself!”

Saiki: “ *And you’re definitely just speaking from experience* .”

Natsuki: “So, they *were* fighting, huh?”

Jesse: “Nat, what’re you talking about?! Why would me n’ Bojack drink in the database at all? Y’know we only do that in the hotel, you know, where the alcohol actually is!”

Kurumada: “Fucking hell, how persistent are ya?!”

L: “I believe I may know why. But first, I propose a question. If Bojack was not the one to smash a tablet, then it would have to have been Jesse, correct? Then, why did Jesse feel the need to do so?”

Brian: “Oh yeah. If Bojack wasn’t the one who did all those things around the database, then it probably was Jesse. But what does that other question mean?”

L: “If Jesse simply wished to cause a loud sound to scare Brian out of the database, there was no stopping him from simply using a chair or even a cabinet to cause an equally loud noise. However, for Jesse to go out of his way to use a tablet means that there was something on it that he didn’t want anyone to see.”

Natsuki: “Are you saying there was something on Bojack’s tablet Jesse wanted to hide from us?”

Jesse: “Oh, come the fuck on! What kind of mental gymnastics is that?! It doesn’t matter what was used to cause the noise!”

Latte: “I have to admit, I didn’t think there was anything important on the tablets.”

Monotora: “Your tablets are *the* most important thing on this island! Even more important than you useless lot! Especially in terms of their price, kehehe.”

Hayasaka: “F-From what I recall, the only options present on the tablet are the map, rules, worker files, and… the texting app.”

Kurumada: “The first three are basically worthless here. Everyone has access to those.”

Brian: “But it can’t be the texting app, right? I thought when a message is sent, everyone can see it.”

L: “Not quite – that is just the public chat. There is a function that allows for private messaging between two individuals as well. Don’t you remember how in the last case, Latte was sent a private message from Yuri?”

Latte: “Oh, I love that feature! Me and Mai would always use it to chat when we were apart.”

Kurumada: “Shit, that’s it. Why haven’t I tried that with… Uh, I mean, I ain’t sayin’ nothing over here!”

Saiki: “ *Well that doesn’t sound suspicious at all* .”

Natsuki: “Then, if Jesse was trying to hide something from a private message on Bojack’s tablet, then could it have been about inviting Bojack to the database?”

Hayasaka: “In fact, Natsuki, that might be it. Jesse must’ve destroyed the tablet in order to prevent us from discovering such a conversation from being found.”

Brian: “Oh, so that’s why Jesse went out of his way to choose the tablet to make the noise. It was kind of like killing two birds with one stone.”

Monotora: “Oh ho ho, Brian! I see we both share a love for devouring pesky feathered freaks?”

Brian: “I-It’s just an expression!”

Kurumada: “And we’re sayin’ that the entire reason the two were at the database was because Jesse invited Bojack over?”

Hayasaka: “I… believe so. It would give us a more sustainable reason as to why Bojack was in the database to begin with–”

Jesse: “Where’s my argument, bitch?!”

INTERJECTION

Kurumada: “Gh, what now?!”

Jesse: “I didn’t! I didn’t fuckin’ invite noone nowhere, assholes! You’re so bent for accusing me for so long, Mr. Hayasaka! I thought I could trust you, but apparently this has all been for jack!”

Hayasaka: “...Perhaps I am. Then, what do you have to say now?”

Jesse: “Oh, I’ve got so much to say to you.”

Natsuki: “...”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Jesse: “Remember when we all agreed that someone poured beer onto the circuit breaker to cause a blackout? That means the entire place would’a been as dark as a damn ass crack! How would you expect *anyone* to see shit after that?”

Hayasaka: “You have a point. However, Brian was still capable of feeling his way towards the light switch, wasn’t he?”

Jesse: “Yeah, but that’s just one thing! How would I – how would the *killer* even find their way back to Bojack, feel through each pocket ‘til they found **his tablet** , and then find where the monitors were, all before Brian could turn the lights on again, or, or even run into them? Let me spell it out for you: it’s impossible! So just give it up already!”

Hayasaka: (“...Jesse, I know you don’t want to do this. *I* certainly don’t want to do this. But, don’t you see how long this has gone on for? How long can you fight this? How long *do* you want to fight this?”)

BOJACK’S MISSING TABLET

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “No, Jesse. It’s… It’s very much still possible. It’s possible, as it wasn’t *Bojack* ’s tablet that was smashed. It was *yours* .”

Jesse: “...”

Latte: “Jesse’s? Are you saying he broke his own tablet?”

L: “Of course it would’ve proven an extra challenge to retrieve Bojack’s tablet to hide the evidence of the invite. However, it would’ve been a lot simpler for Jesse to reach into his own pocket in the dark, would it not?”

Brian: “I see. So when I said Bojack’s tablet was the one to be smashed, I was only led to believe that because I couldn’t find it on his person. But, all that really meant was that his tablet was gone, not definitely broken.”

Kurumada: “Then where is it now? Don’t tell me Jesse pocketed it after breaking his own.”

Hayasaka: “Who would know the difference…?”

Kurumada: “...Huh. No one, eh?”

L: “No matter which tablet was broken, one would always end up in Jesse’s possession, and so we would never be able to see the conversation regardless. That’s why I’ve been very diligent with my wording. I never once specified Bojack’s tablet was the one to be smashed, only *a* tablet.”

Monotora: “This fucker’s way too good at keepin’ an eye on what he says! No one’s shoving a stick up ya ass, y’know that? Feel free to speak like a normal creature!”

Jesse: “...”

Latte: “...Jesse?”

Jesse: “...C’mon, this is… What? W-What’re you trying to… What does that even mean…? I…”

Natsuki: “...Hey, can someone summarise what we’ve talked about so far? I just want to make sure of all this.”

Jesse: “What…?”

L: “During a drunken fight between Jesse and Bojack in the database, a provocation led to Jesse smashing a beer bottle over Bojack’s head. Most likely delirious from the impact, Bojack had tripped over a wire and hit his head on the side of a cabinet. However, before Jesse could act, Brian had entered the database. In order to not be spotted, he caused a blackout, then proceeded to create a loud noise to scare Brian out.”

Brian: “After that, he blocked the entrance with a cabinet so I couldn’t get back inside…”

Kurumada: “And then, ‘cuz he basically locked himself up too, he had to drag Bojack’s body over to the window to get a boost up. Must’a also took all the rest of the alcohol with him too.”

Natsuki: “And Jesse was definitely the one to do all of that?”

Saiki: “ *He’s the only one who’d ever want to drink with Bojack* .”

Hayasaka: “And, as he is most likely the only individual Bojack would accept such an invitation from, it wouldn’t make much sense for it to be anyone else…”

L: “Well, there is only one way for Jesse to prove his innocence now. If he were to show us his tablet – turned on, mind you – to see who it belonged to, we would either have our theory confirmed or denied.”

Natsuki: “...I see.”

Jesse: “...Nat, c’mon. You don’t–you don’t believe this shit, do you? I thought you were gonna figure out Bojack’s killer with me. Why’re you just now helpin’ them? Why’re you actin’ against me?! I thought you believed m–”

Natsuki: “ *Shut up, Jesse* !”

Latte: “Natsuki…!”

Natsuki: “I swear to god, just shut up already! This is so freaking annoying! You’re just–you’re making this so painful to listen to!”

Jesse: “ *What…* ?”

Natsuki: “You are acting the *exact* same way I did when I was being accused of murder, for god’s sake! Don’t think I can’t see a liar as desperate as you! For the record, I was on your side. I genuinely wanted to help you. But, when you were first called out, the moment I saw your face, it changed. It changed just like mine did. And, things didn’t feel right anymore. You kept shouting, swearing, denying each and every little thing they said and it–it pissed me off!”

Jesse: “...Nat–”

Natsuki: “Don’t *Nat* me. The only words that should come out of your mouth now is a confession, or I don’t wanna hear it! Just stop already! Say you killed Bojack! J-Just say it! Don’t, *hic* , don’t let it hurt me any longer!”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...Well…?”

Jesse: “...”

…

Jesse: “... *Sob* …”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse…?”)

Jesse: “ *It… I-It was all an accident, yo…* ”

Hayasaka: “An… *An accident* ?”

Natsuki: “ *Huh* …?”

Latte: “J-Jesse…?”

Brian: “W-What? You… You don’t mean you…”

Jesse: “ *Sniff… gh…* ”

Saiki: “...”

Kurumada: “...Damnit. What’re you talkin’ about? If you were drunk, surely you…”

Hayasaka: “...Ah, n-no. I think it’s a lot more than that. I don’t think… Jesse *intended* to kill Bojack at all.”

L: “Hm. Indeed. If Jesse had intended to murder Bojack, his method does not seem planned. Something as ruthless as smashing a bottle over his head is an act more likely to be done in the heat of the moment. Furthermore, doesn’t his method for causing the blackout seem rather unorthodox?”

Latte: “But I… I thought it was because he wasn’t expecting Brian to show up.”

L: “Yet, if Jesse had planned everything out, he would’ve already taken precautions to make sure no one showed up at all.”

Kurumada: “Hell, him usin’ the window to escape only happened ‘cuz he locked himself inside, eh?”

Hayasaka: (“And… it’s not just that.”) “...I remember what Jesse said, before we started the investigation…”

FLASHBACK

Latte: “Jesse, dear… What would you like us to do for Bojack?”

Picking his head up, Jesse stared straight at Bojack’s body.

Jesse: “ *...I’m sorry* .”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “That… wasn’t because you were sorry you couldn’t prevent his death. You were sorry because *you* had caused it.”

Natsuki: “N-No… That… Jesse, is that true…?”

Jesse: “...I don’t know how you do it. Feels like you just, *sniff* , look into my mind, n’ shit. Pick out what I don’t wanna put into words. You’re damn scary, Mr. Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...I don’t think that’s got anything to do with this. He’s just sayin’ what you should be right now.”

Latte: “But, why did you keep it a secret for so long in the trial, Jesse? If you already knew you were the killer, why did you act like you didn’t know…?”

Brian: “Not just that, but your suicide theory, too. Why did you want to lie to us with that?”

Jesse: “...’Cuz I was damn scared, alright? Any of you would be, knowin’ you were gonna get found out eventually. Why wouldn’t I wanna prevent the inevitable just a lil’ longer?”

Saiki: “ *So you always had a feeling you were going to be exposed* .”

Jesse: “You think I even stand a fightin’ chance against you guys? I’ve been in these past trials too, y’know. I’ve seen what crazy shit has been figured out. What I did was nothing like the others. How smart they’ve been. How fuckin’ dumb mine was in comparison. But, still, I was too scared to come clean. I was too scared to *die* . But… I realised how far I’d gone when Natsuki snapped me outta it with what she said.”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “Bet I looked real fuckin’ stupid, huh? You’re right. I should just shut up. I gotta… admit it. Heh, I can’t lie to myself, either. I don’t think I can even live knowin’ I killed him. I can’t live knowin’ I killed Bojack.”

Natsuki: “Wait, J-Jesse, I–”

Jesse: “You got your killer right here, bitches. So, go on. Go ahead and vote for me. I don’t… I don’t care anymore…”

Natsuki: “What? What do you mean you don’t care…?”

Jesse: “...”

Latte: “Jesse… No, you don’t want it to end like this… Do you?”

Saiki: “ *It’s the only way we can let it end. He’s already confessed to the murder* .”

Jesse: "..."

Hayasaka: ("He doesn't care anymore…? No, I… It's not as if I want to get you killed, Jesse. Of course I don't. But what am I supposed to do? What else am I supposed to do here? Even you admitted it yourself. Even if it was just an accident. And even if you never intended for such a thing… Even if you promised not to… Even when you told Bojack… Even when…")

FLASHBACK

Bojack: "... *Christ* . You're an idiot for doing that. Why were you even thinking like that in the first place? That's not like you to feel that way about your own life. That's not you at all."

Bojack's slightly aggressive tone had Jesse stunned to silence. Quietly, he dragged his knees up to his chest, clenching his teeth at the movement on his wound.

Jesse: "*... I'm sorry* ."

Bojack stared at Jesse for a moment, before sighing.

Bojack: "...No."

Jesse: "No…?"

Bojack: "I'm… I should be the one apologising here. This whole thing is my fault. I was stubborn– no, I was an *asshole* for making you walk off and experience that hallucination. If anything, you should be the one getting mad at me."

Jesse: "You think I'm not? But, what's the point of bein' mad at each other now?"

Bojack: "...There isn't one."

Hayasaka’s lips remained sealed, feeling out of place in their intimately strained moment. He watched as Jesse glanced up at Bojack.

Jesse: “...I won’t… I won’t do somethin’ like that again. I promise.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“... *No* . Jesse promised Bojack he wouldn’t do something so reckless again. So this– this doesn’t make sense. He wouldn’t throw it all away, would he? He wouldn’t get drunk and kill Bojack not even a day after that, would he?”)

Monotora: “...Mm, I sense this lil’ chit-chat has all wrapped up now, eh? I think it’s about time we move onto the vote, kehehe!”

Hayasaka: (“It’s not just that. I still feel as if some things are missing. As if we’ve been ignoring something. Should… Should I say something? No, Jesse’s confessed. He’s confessed to the murder, hasn’t he? But, his promise… I don’t, ah, *I don’t know* !”)

Monotora: “Aaaalrighty then! Get out ya tablets and give a good whack on who you think–”

Kurumada: “Hey, stop it!”

Monotora: “Gweh?! Who said you could interrupt *me* ?!”

Kurumada: “We ain’t votin’ yet, damnit!”

Monotora: “Oh yeah? And why’s that?”

Kurumada: “‘Cuz someone here ain’t ready. Ain’t ya, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Wh–huh?!”

Kurumada: “I noticed how uneasy your face was just now. Ain’t no way we doin’ anything if you ain’t looking a hundred percent about it.”

Hayasaka: “Well, t-that is…”

L: “...If there is a single doubt in someone’s mind, it’s best to put it at ease before we vote, don’t you think?”

Latte: “Take a deep breath, Hayasaka. Tell us what’s wrong.”

Hayasaka: “... *Sigh* . I don’t… I-I don’t think we’re done. There’s something off here. Something I just don’t understand.”

Jesse: “Huh? *What* ? What–What else is there to understand? I’ve already told you I’m the killer. I don’t get the holdup.”

L: “Hayasaka, why don’t you ask some questions? That way, you’ll have a better grasp at what exactly you don’t understand.”

Monotora: “Aw, come on! I hate this damn faux votin’ shit! Can’t ya just let me go through with it without overtime for once?!”

Brian: “H-Hey! Let Hayasaka speak!”

Hayasaka: (“I… I don’t know what I’m feeling right now. It’s… awry, and unjust. Yet… Maybe all I need to do is ask.”) “...Jesse, c-can you go through the case again? In–In your own words?”

Jesse: “I mean, I guess. But, it’s just gonna be the same shit you already know.”

Hayasaka: “That’s okay. I’d just like to hear it.”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Jesse: “So me n’ Bojack are at the database. We’re–We’re drinking, and things get heated.”

Latte: “Did you really hit Bojack, Jesse?”

Jesse: “...Yeah, and I watched him trip on some loose wire I could barely see on the floor. He goes stumblin’, and hits his head clean on the side of a cabinet.”

Brian: “How long after that did I arrive at the database?”

Jesse: “I dunno… Couldn’t have been more than a couple’a minutes, considerin’ I hadn’t done jack but stare at his corpse. That’s when I snapped into panic mode. Decided to dump a whole bottle onto the circuit breaker. Could hardly see in front of me when the lights dipped.”

Kurumada: “But ya managed to get to the monitors in time, huh?”

Jesse: “Just about. That’s when I smashed my own tablet to hide **Bojack ever invitin’ me to the damn place** at all. Thought I was being crafty with that too: stealing Bojack’s tablet afterwards to look like his one got done in.”

Natsuki: “And… you really used Bojack to escape the database too?”

Jesse: “...Yeah. After I blocked the entrance, I dragged his damn fresh corpse over to the windows just to use him as a boost. I was lucky to make the jump on the first try. Some fuckin’ friend I am, huh…?”

Hayasaka: (“...Hang on. That… That’s not what we said before. What’s Jesse talking about?”)

BROKEN TABLET

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Jesse… Was *Bojack* the one to invite *you* to the database?”

Jesse: “Yeah? That’s literally what I just said, right?”

Brian: “Huh? But before, I thought we said it was you who invited Bojack.”

Jesse: “Oh, you did? I guess I wasn’t paying much attention at the time. I was, uh, more in the mindset of just fightin’ the allegations.”

Natsuki: “So then, why did Bojack invite you there?”

Jesse: “I… I don’t know. When I got the message from him telling me to come meet him there, I thought he was pullin’ a prank or some shit at first.”

Saiki: “ *Either of you going there just seems strange* .”

Jesse: “Yeah, well Bojack explained he wanted somewhere ‘quiet and secluded’. I guess he meant in terms of, like, really bein’ alone ‘cuz of how far off it was from everyone else at the hotel. I decided to go anyway, just in case he was bein’ serious, and lo and behold, he was just sitting there with a bunch’a alcohol. He tells me to help myself. I thought it was some kinda bit – wanting to drink somewhere kinda funny – I dunno. But, as we’re talking, he… mentions something.”

Hayasaka: “W-What did he say?”

Jesse: “Something… along the lines of our ‘final drink together’.”

Hayasaka: (“ *What* …?”)

Jesse: “I just, fuck, I just start freaking the fuck out: yelling at him, grabbing his arm tryn’a take him someplace else. I’m just seein’ red, man. But Bojack, the stubborn asshole, refuses to even get up. Then, he hits me. Thinkin’ back on it, it was ‘prolly just outta frustration, but that was the last straw for me. I start hitting back, and before we know it, a fight breaks out.”

L: “And I assume that’s when the bottle came into play?”

Jesse: “...I just pick it up, and hit him. I didn’t know what I was thinking. If I had just held off, even for a second, maybe I could’ve…”

Natsuki: “...Oh. Oh my *god* …”

Latte: “...But why did you start panicking so much when Bojack said ‘final drink’? Shouldn’t that be a good thing, him giving such a thing up?”

Kurumada: “Latte, he, uh, didn’t mean it that way…”

Brian: “Then, what way? I don’t know much about drinking either, s-so…”

Hayasaka: (“...Oh god. I wish I could be as naive as them right now.”)

L: “...It meant Bojack *was* planning to take his own life this entire time.”

Jesse: “I had figured as much. From the way he said it, I thought he already did somethin’ to himself to make sure he’d die soon.”

Latte: “...Oh, goodness. Surely… surely not…”

Jesse: “I… *sniff* , I killed Bojack before whatever the hell else was goin’ to… *S-Shit* …”

Natsuki: “J-Jesse…”

Hayasaka: (“...That’s it. That’s what this feeling was.”) “...Hey, Jesse. What did Bojack do to ensure he would die?”

Jesse: “Huh? I… I dunno, man. My guess is that he took some pills from the pharmacy.”

Kurumada: “Mr. Detective *did* mention to be careful ‘round that place.”

L: “Although, is there evidence for such a claim?”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t believe there is. We didn’t find anything suspicious on his body, nor any signs of pills when we searched his room earlier.”

Natsuki: “What if he tossed them away somewhere we wouldn’t think to look?”

Saiki: “ *Would someone like Bojack really go that far?* ”

L: “We don’t need to concern ourselves with such a dilemma. There’s a much more obvious method Bojack would utilise here.”

Hayasaka: (“...It’s *that* , isn’t it?”)

VODKA BOTTLES

Hayasaka: “Bojack had attempted to drink himself to death, right?”

Latte: “ *Drink* himself to death?”

Jesse: “Wait, what? C’mon, that’s not possible. Bojack drank *all* the damn time. He could ‘prolly handle his drink better than all of us combined.”

Brian: “Well, um, actually, considering that most of here don’t drink anyway–”

Jesse: “You know what I mean!”

Hayasaka: “While you are right, Jesse, don’t you remember the vast amount of alcohol in Bojack’s room?”

Natsuki: “There definitely was a lot, now that I think about it…”

Hayasaka: “I happened to notice the majority seemed to be vodka. And these bottles weren't small, either: each was around 750ml, according to the label.”

L: “I believe the alcohol presence for such a bottle measures up to 40%.”

Kurumada: “Hell, not even I would wanna down one of those in one go.”

Saiki: “ *It’s not like we needed to know your drinking preferences* .”

Hayasaka: “That’s the thing. One bottle alone to Bojack couldn’t have done anything. But, when you add them all up…”

Brian: “...It starts looking kind of concerning, huh?”

L: “Therefore, if Bojack was attempting to take his own life, alcohol poisoning appears to be the most viable method.”

Latte: “Does that mean he spent *all* day drinking all those bottles?”

L: “For someone like Bojack, it would hardly prove a challenge. If anything, his ‘final drink’ would’ve only solidified his death.”

Jesse: “I mean–I mean, sure, Bojack did look kinda shit-faced when I first arrived, but that doesn’t automatically mean he’d been downin’ all that beforehand! Bojack’s a damn alcoholic horse, who, just to remind you all, weighed twelve-hundred pounds! He knows his own limits.”

Hayasaka: “And yet, if Bojack knew his limits, wouldn’t he also know how much he needed to overdo it?”

Jesse: “But who cares? Who cares how Bojack was gonna kill himself? It still doesn’t change the fact that *I* was the one to kill him in the end, alright?! You should’a just started the vote the second I outed myself. Feels like you’re just tryn’a rub salt in the wound.”

L: “Actually, I would personally thank Hayasaka for pursuing this route. After all, we’ve now come across a dire problem.”

Natsuki: “Huh? What problem?”

L: “How do we know Bojack did not succumb to alcohol poisoning before the blow to his head could kill him?”

Brian: “What…?”

L: “Bojack had drunk himself as close as he could to death before his drink with Jesse. What was stopping him from dying any time at the database, even during his so-called ‘fatal’ moment with Jesse during their fight?”

Kurumada: “Eh? What the hell’re ya sayin’ now?! Are you saying we *don’t* know how Bojack died?!”

Latte: “If it was from hitting his head, the killer would be Jesse. But, if Bojack did actually die from alcohol poisoning instead like you theorised, the killer would be Bojack himself. But…”

Saiki: “ *But we don’t know which one did it* .”

Monotora: “Gahahaha! Why don’t ya check the Nesos File?”

Brian: “B-But you omitted the cause of death!”

Monotora: “Did I really now? When was that then, in my sleep? I didn’t write that shit myself, you know?”

Natsuki: “If we don’t know, then what the hell are we supposed to do?! We can’t die if we don’t know, t-that’s not fair!”

L: “...I believe there’s no reason to worry. The true cause will eventually out itself.”

Natsuki: “L-Like that’s any assurance coming from you!”

Jesse: “Guys, c’mon! Ignore this asshole – he’s freaking you all out for no reason! I literally watched Bojack die right in front of me! I *have* to be the killer!”

Hayasaka: (“...I was afraid of what L was going to say. I didn’t want us to reach this point. And yet… I still feel something is wrong. Something we never truly figured out from the beginning… *Wait a minute* .”) “Jesse…?”

Jesse: “Yeah?”

Hayasaka: “How were you able to drag Bojack to the wall?”

Jesse: “Uh, I just… did.”

Saiki: “ *You just… did* ?”

Jesse: “I don’t know! What the fuck do you want me to say?!”

Brian: “Wait, but wasn’t that still a problem? Even if it was just from the cabinet to the servers, we didn’t think anyone would’ve been able to drag him.”

Jesse: “Maybe like, he got lighter when he died?”

L: “Quite the opposite. An individual’s body becomes a lot heavier once they die.”

Kurumada: “That added alongside his usual weight… Fuck, that doesn’t make any sense!”

Jesse: “Well maybe I’m just hella strong! Are you jealous or something?!”

Kurumada: “Why would I be jealous of you?!”

Hayasaka: (“Then how was Jesse able to move Bojack so easily? And why is Jesse so insistent it was possible? It’s almost as if he’s denying the possibility of something, but what? I mean, ah, it’s not as if it has any connection to our current dilemma. Even if Bojack had attempted to take his own life, Jesse had already killed him before he could.”)

…

Hayasaka: ("...He did, right?")

Natsuki: "Ugh, I'm still confused! What do we do? I don't wanna die!"

Jesse: "It's alright, Natsuki. I was there. I know what happened. I know–"

Hayasaka: "Do you know, Jesse?"

Jesse: "...What?"

Hayasaka: "...I don't think you do."

Brian: "H-Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: ("...That's right.")

Jesse: "W-What the? Are you fucking with me right now?! Now you're suddenly sayin' you know better than me?! The *killer* ? That's–That's so fucking rich!"

Hayasaka: "How do you know you killed Bojack, Jesse?"

Jesse: "'Cuz he never moved after he died! He never moved after he hit his head, never moved when I dragged his body, never moved when I climbed on him to get to the window! I don't know about you, but that screams pretty fucking dead to me!"

Hayasaka: "..."

Jesse: “Oh, and back to the silent treatment? What? You don’t think I could’a dragged Bojack? You don’t think I killed Bojack? So you’re wrong? What is it? What?!”

Kurumada: “Will ya stop fucking harassin’ him already–?!”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada, it’s okay.”

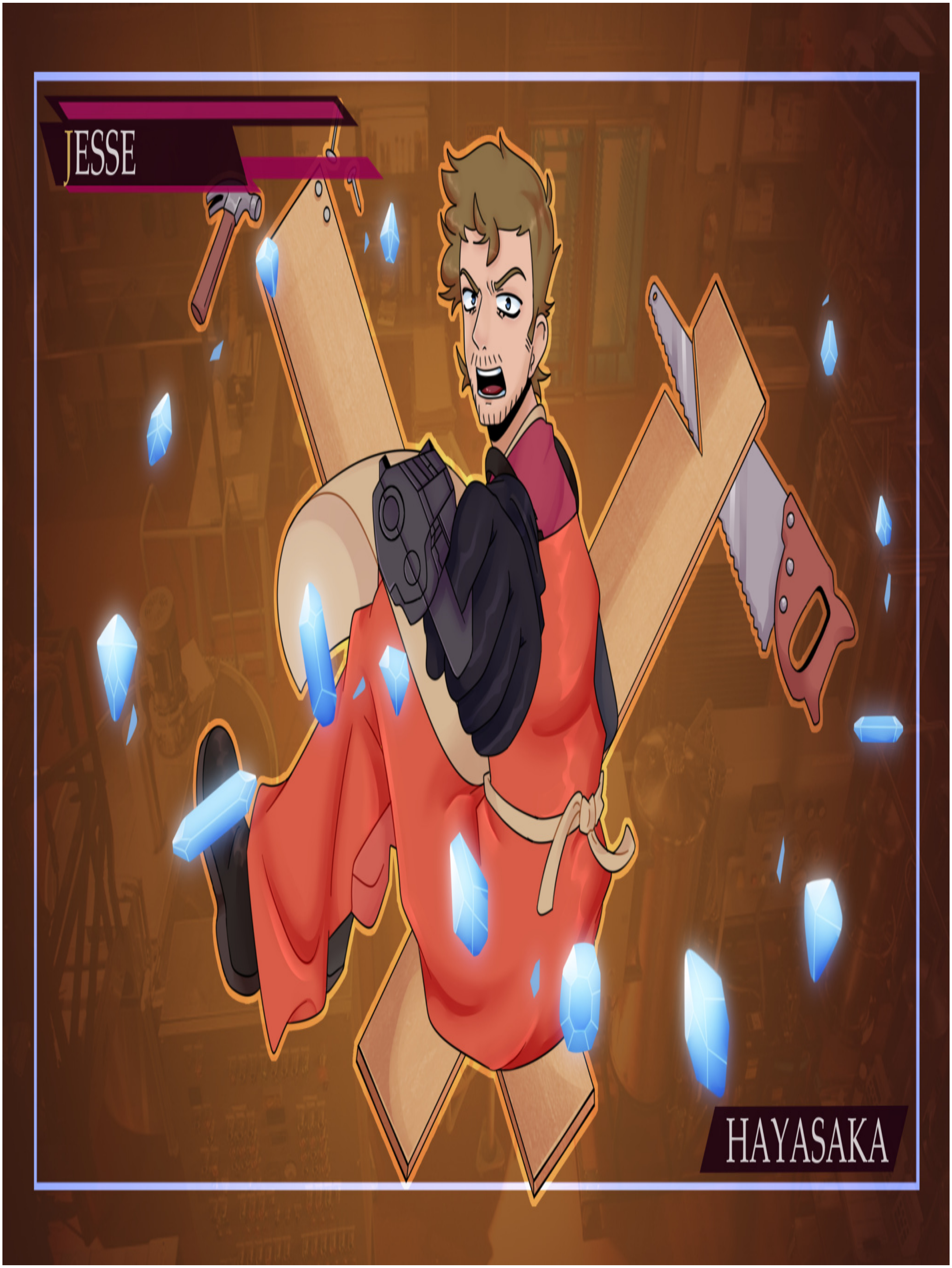
Jesse: “...”

Hayasaka: (“That’s right, Jesse. Please, just fight me. Fight me like they’ve all done before. It’s easier to say it then, right? The truth is easier when they’re against you. Then I know what I’m doing is right. Because here, there’s something I don’t want you to know. I don’t want you to know the truth. I don’t think even Bojack would want you to know the truth. But if I don’t…”)

…

Hayasaka: (“I need to, don’t I?”)

ARGUMENT ARMAMENT


JESSE
HAYASAKA

Jesse:

“Just accept the truth!”

“I killed Bojack! Cased closed!”

“Ain’t that what everyone wanted to hear from the start?”

ADVANCE

“We don’t gotta drag this out any longer!”

“I know I was bein’ stubborn before, but I’m not gonna fight you anymore!”

“So go on! Vote for me!”

ADVANCE

“So this is what it really comes down to, huh?”

“Let me tell it to you straight: none of this fucking matters!”

“So what if Bojack tried to kill himself? I got in the way!”

“The cabinet got him before any damn alcohol ever could!”

“And I’d rather die than accept the fact Bojack could’a killed himself!”

“I’d rather kill him myself over n’ over than let him take himself away from me!”

FINAL BLOW

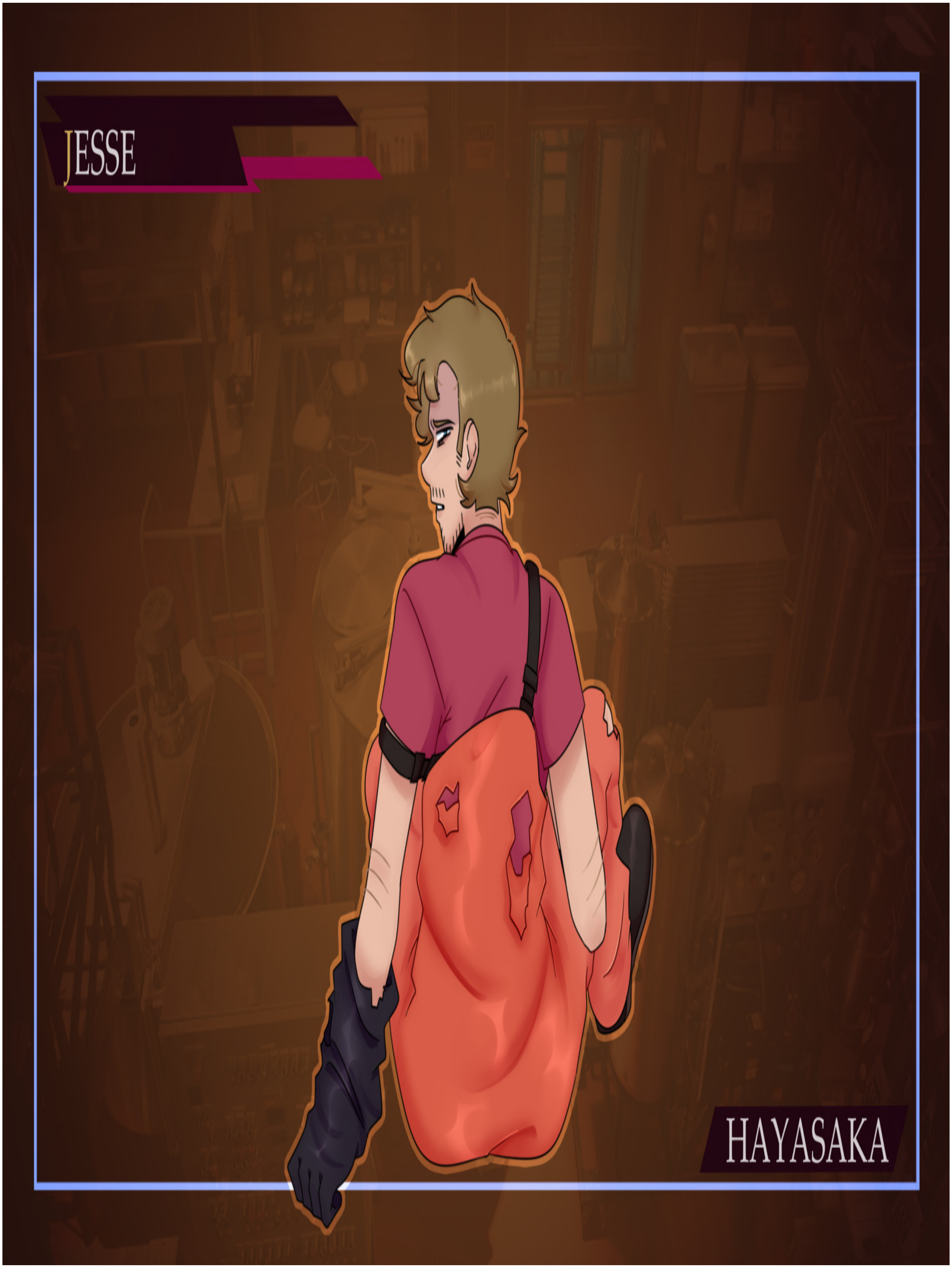
Jesse: “Bojack died because of *me* . And nothin’ could’a stopped that. *No one* could’a stopped that.”

BOJACK

FAKED

THE

DEATH


JESSE
HAYASAKA

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Jesse… You never killed Bojack when you pushed him. He just *pretended* to be dead.”

Jesse: “...Wh… *What* …?”

Kurumada: “He *pretended* ? Ya mean he just acted dead?”

Latte: “But why? Why would he do that? If he was still alive, then he could’ve…”

Natsuki: “N-No… Don’t tell me he still wanted to…”

Jesse: “...”

Brian: “That means… If he *was* still alive, then he could have allowed Jesse to drag his body to the servers, couldn’t he?”

L: “All while under the guise of being ‘dead’. In that case, Bojack would’ve eventually succumbed to alcohol poisoning soon after Jesse had escaped the database.”

Monotora: “No wonder we dubbed him Ultimate Actor, kehe! Then again, it’s a bold ass claim. How’d ya even know he could do that?”

Hayasaka: “...”

BOJACK’S HEAD WOUND

Hayasaka: “...There’s no accurate telling when Bojack should’ve died from the blow. There’s too many factors that cause uncertainty.”

Saiki: " *Maybe he never would've died from it at all* ."

L: "Perhaps not if he never got medical attention. Regardless, he was already prepared to die using his own method."

Latte: "But that doesn't explain why Bojack would want to act dead!"

Hayasaka: "But… it *does* . Jesse said it himself: Bojack had refused to be taken elsewhere to get help. Why would he change his mind at that point?"

Kurumada: "Shit… He still wanted to die by his own terms, even if it meant lyin' to Jesse about it. That's just damn fucked up."

Natsuki: "He must've realised that if he had let Jesse know he was fine, they would've just started fighting again…"

Latte: "Oh my… I…"

L: "...And just as I said, the true cause has eventually come to fruition. What Hayasaka proposed, well, its the exact factor I figured out that had led me to conclude that the entire case was in fact a suicide in Bojack's favour."

Brian: "God, that's…"

Hayasaka: ("...I don't even feel good in the slightest when he mentions me now.")

Jesse: "..."

Natsuki: "Jesse…? Your face, y-you look… so pale."

Jesse: “...I thought I did it… I thought he… Bojack… played dead… He tricked me… He… No… *Sob* …”

Latte: “D-Dear… Oh, oh goodness…”

Kurumada: “Hey, don’t you go cryin’ too, now…”

Hayasaka: (“Jesse looks… mortified. I… I hate what I said. I hate how I can’t take it back. I hate how things have ended up this way…”)

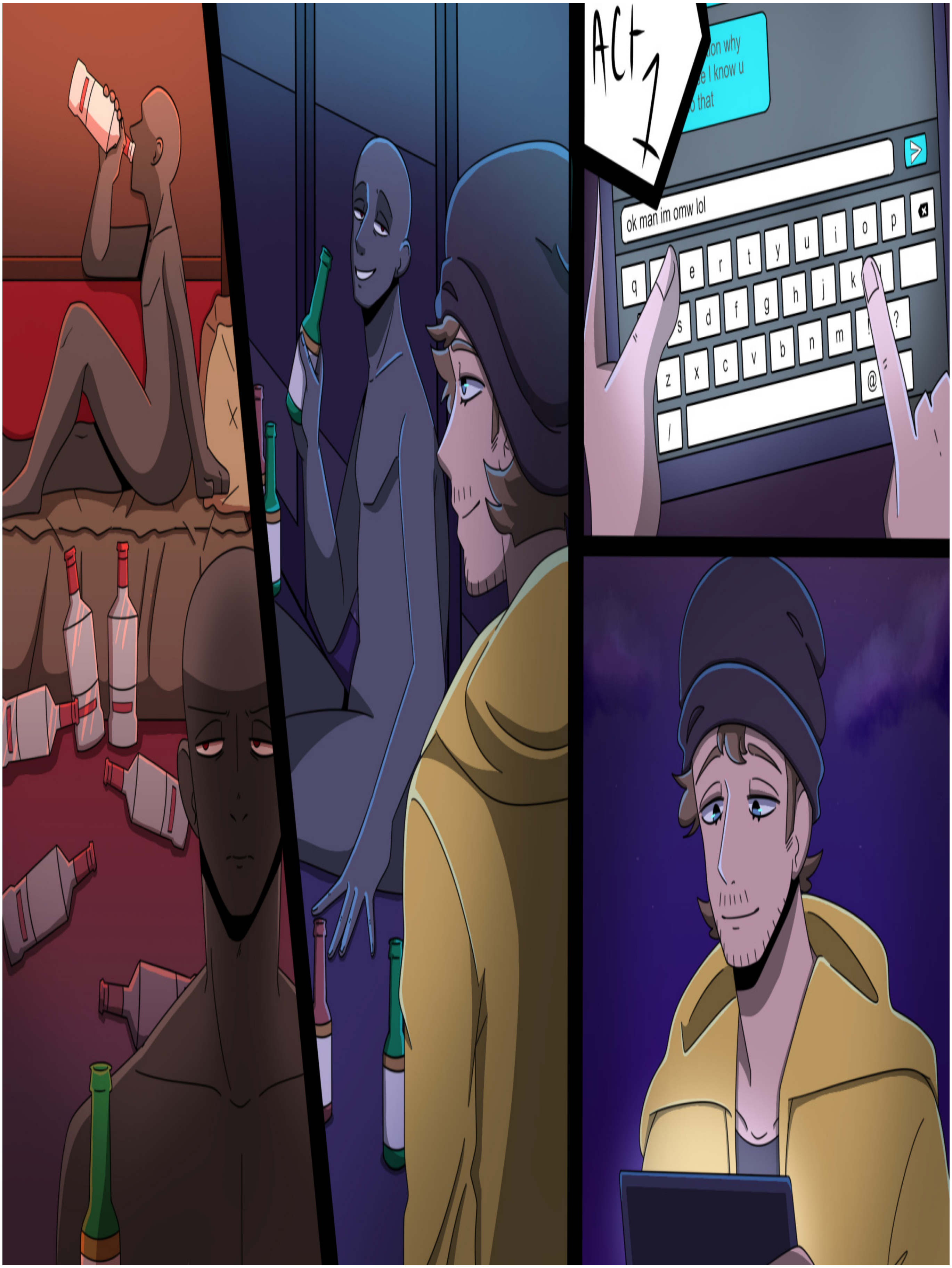
L: “...Well then, we shall conclude the case one last time. That way, everyone should be convinced in order to vote for Bojack.”

Saiki: “ *Even coming from you… Isn’t this just tone deaf?* ”

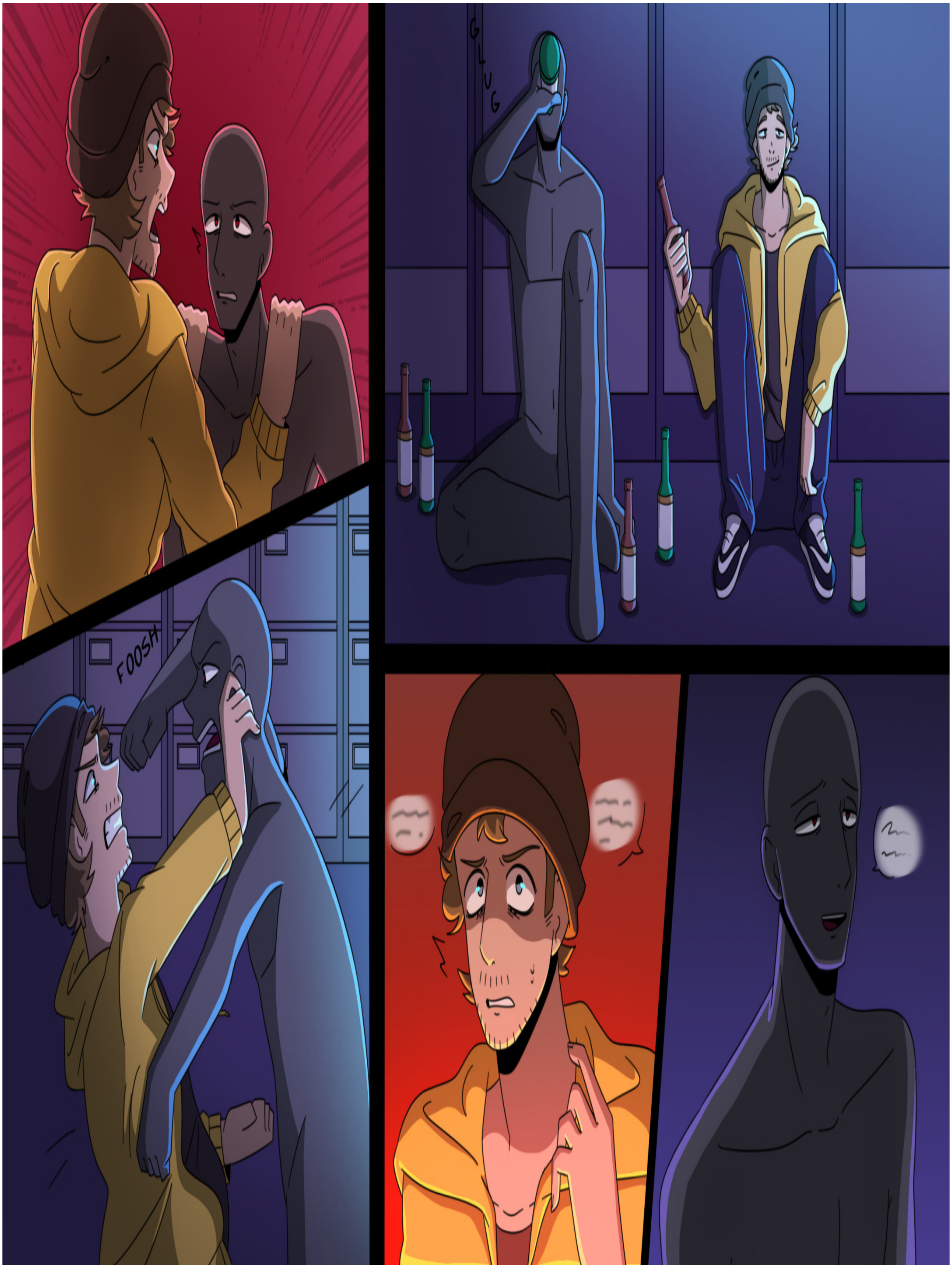
Brian: “No, I-I think we should let him, right? It’s not just about us, but Nesos too. I don’t want us to get in trouble.”

Jesse: “ *Just do it* .”

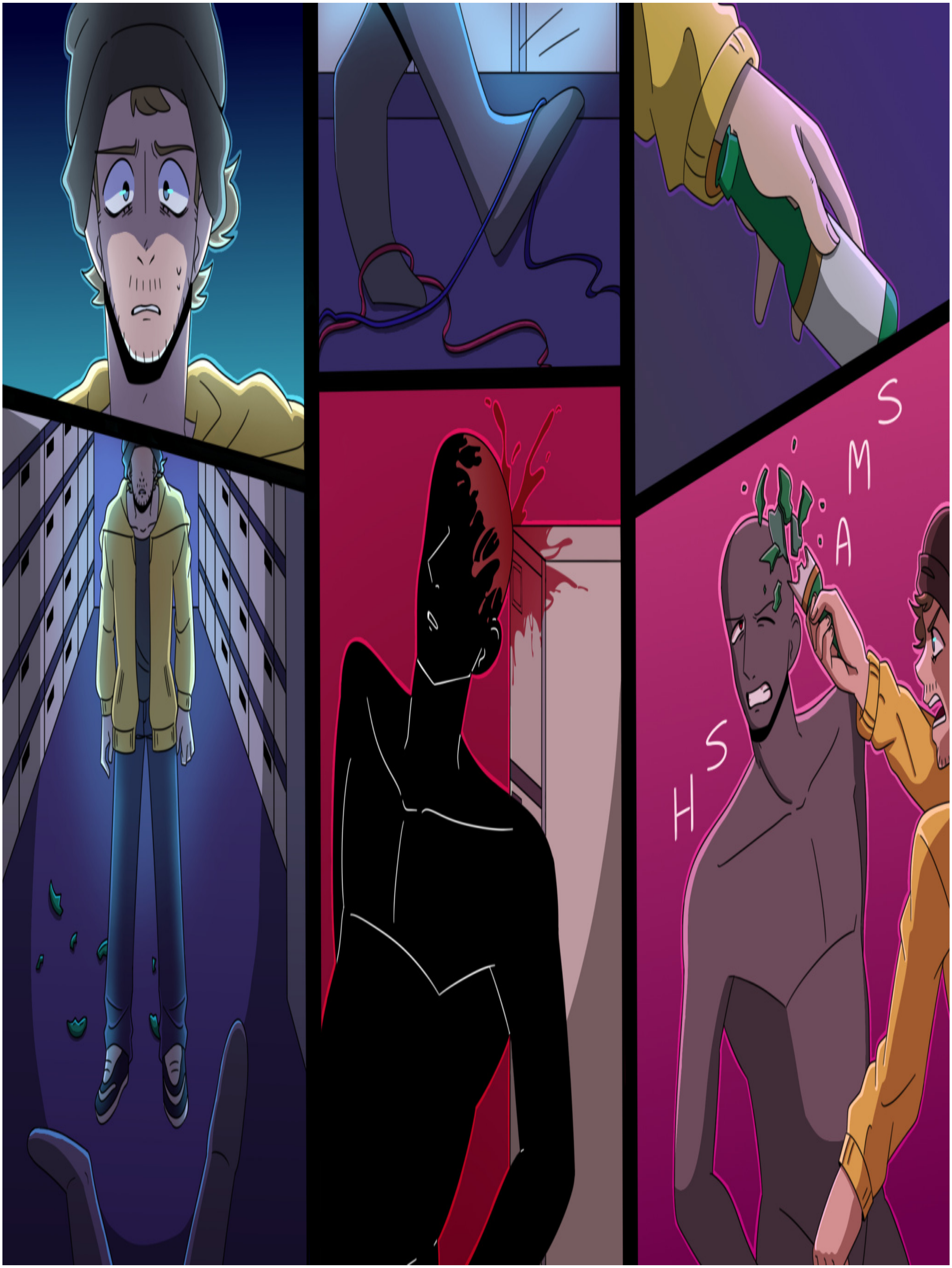
CLOSING ARGUMENT


Act 1
ion why
e I know u
o that
ok man im omw lol

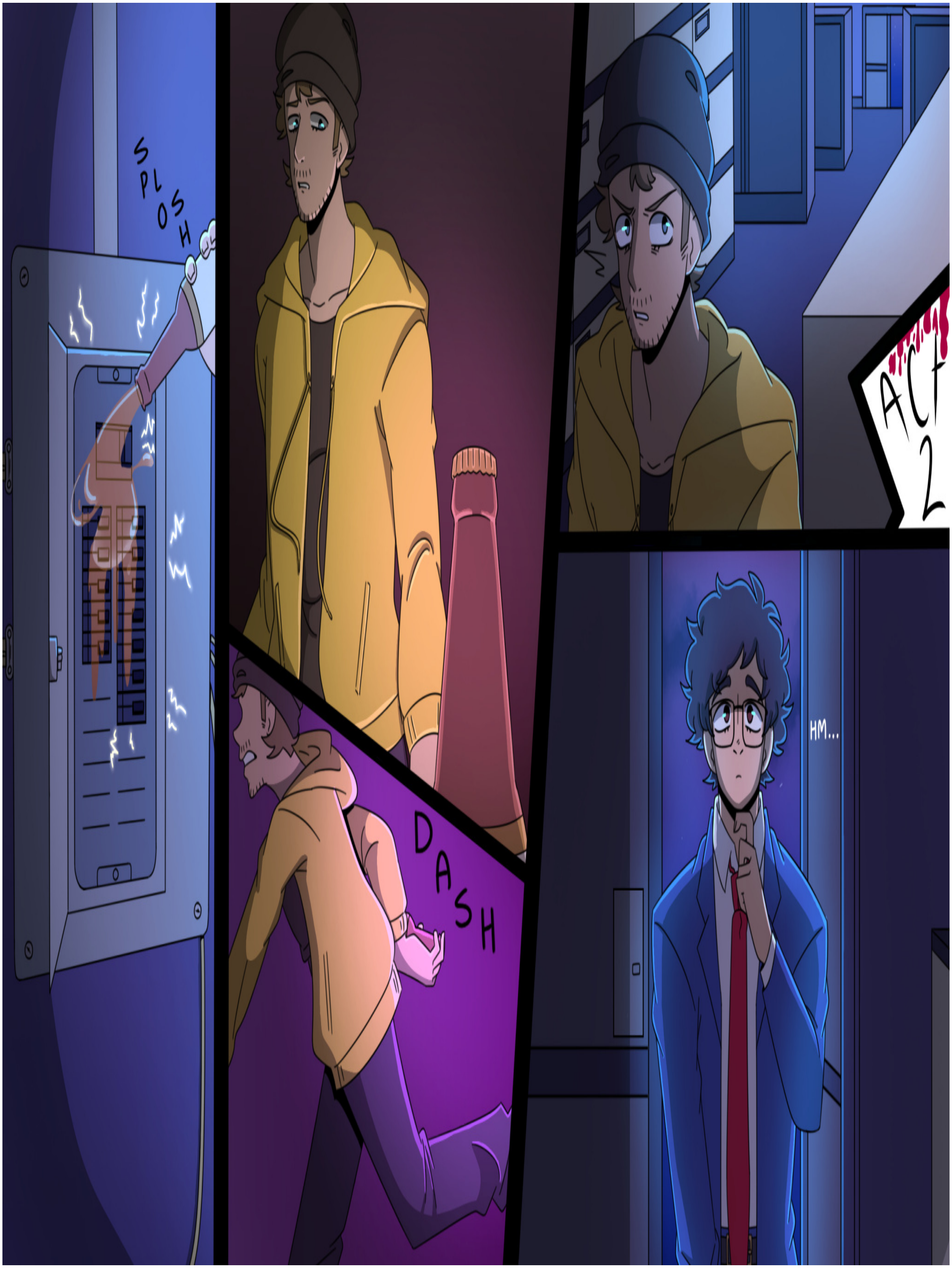
L: “This whole case began the previous night when the culprit had privately messaged Jesse on their tablet, asking him to meet at the database for a drink. Before this, the culprit had been consuming an immense amount of vodka and other such strong alcohols throughout the day to ensure they would succumb to alcohol poisoning during their time together.”


GLUG
FOOSH

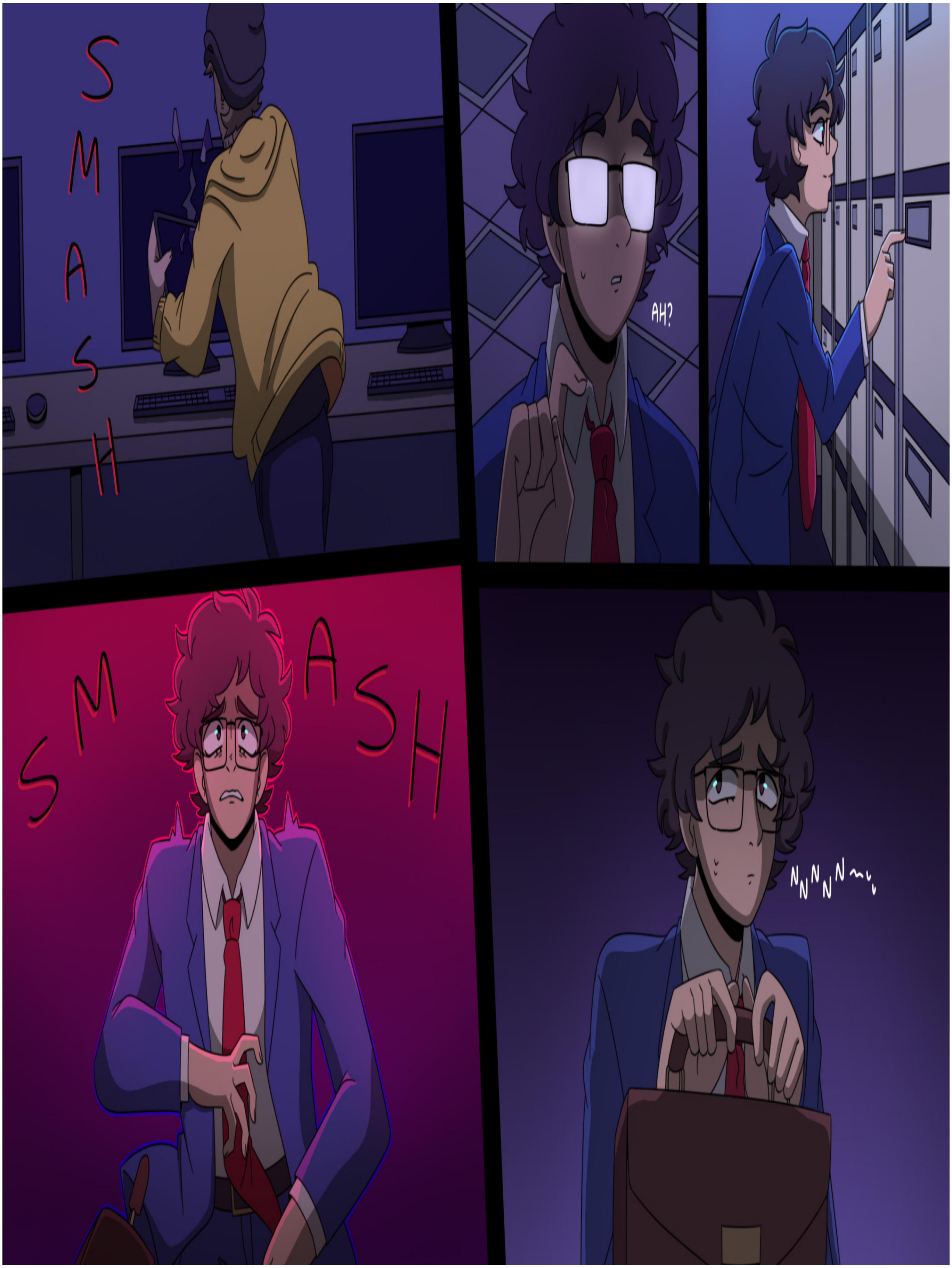
L: “Once Jesse arrived at the database, they began to drink together. Sometime during their drink, however, the culprit mentioned something that caught Jesse’s attention: that it would be their final drink together. Jesse, quickly catching onto what the culprit meant, began to argue with them, attempting to take them somewhere else to get help before it was too late. The culprit did not appreciate this, eventually hitting Jesse back in refusal. This was the spark that caused a fight to break out between the two.”


SMASH

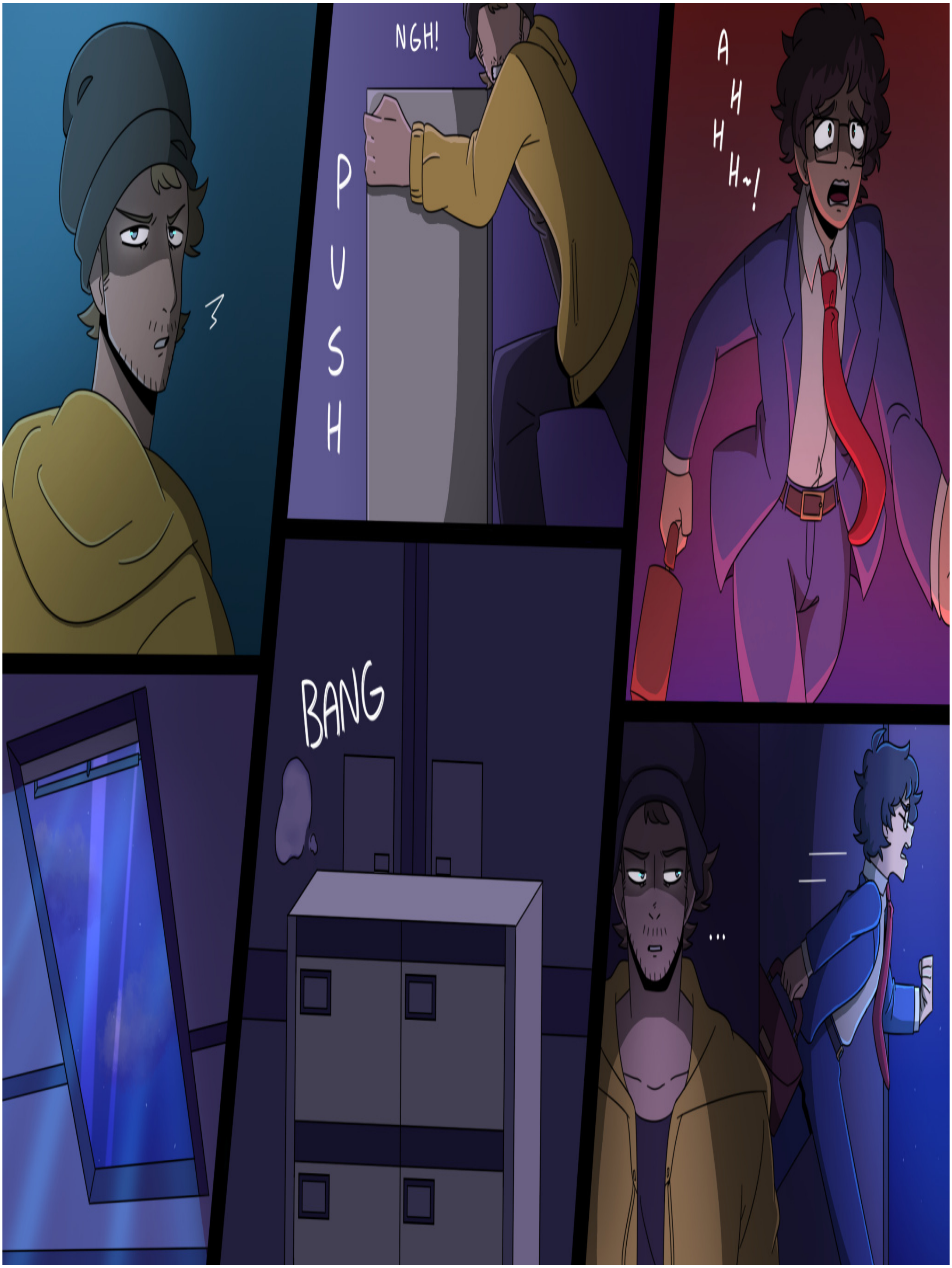
L: “During the fight, Jesse had picked up one of the beer bottles present and smashed it over the culprit’s head. Due to their lowered senses from the alcohol in their system, they stumbled back and tripped on an exposed wire, causing them to fall and hit their head on the edge of a cabinet. To Jesse, this appeared to be a fatal injury, and therefore believed to have killed the culprit himself.”


SPLOSH
DASH
ACT 2
HM...

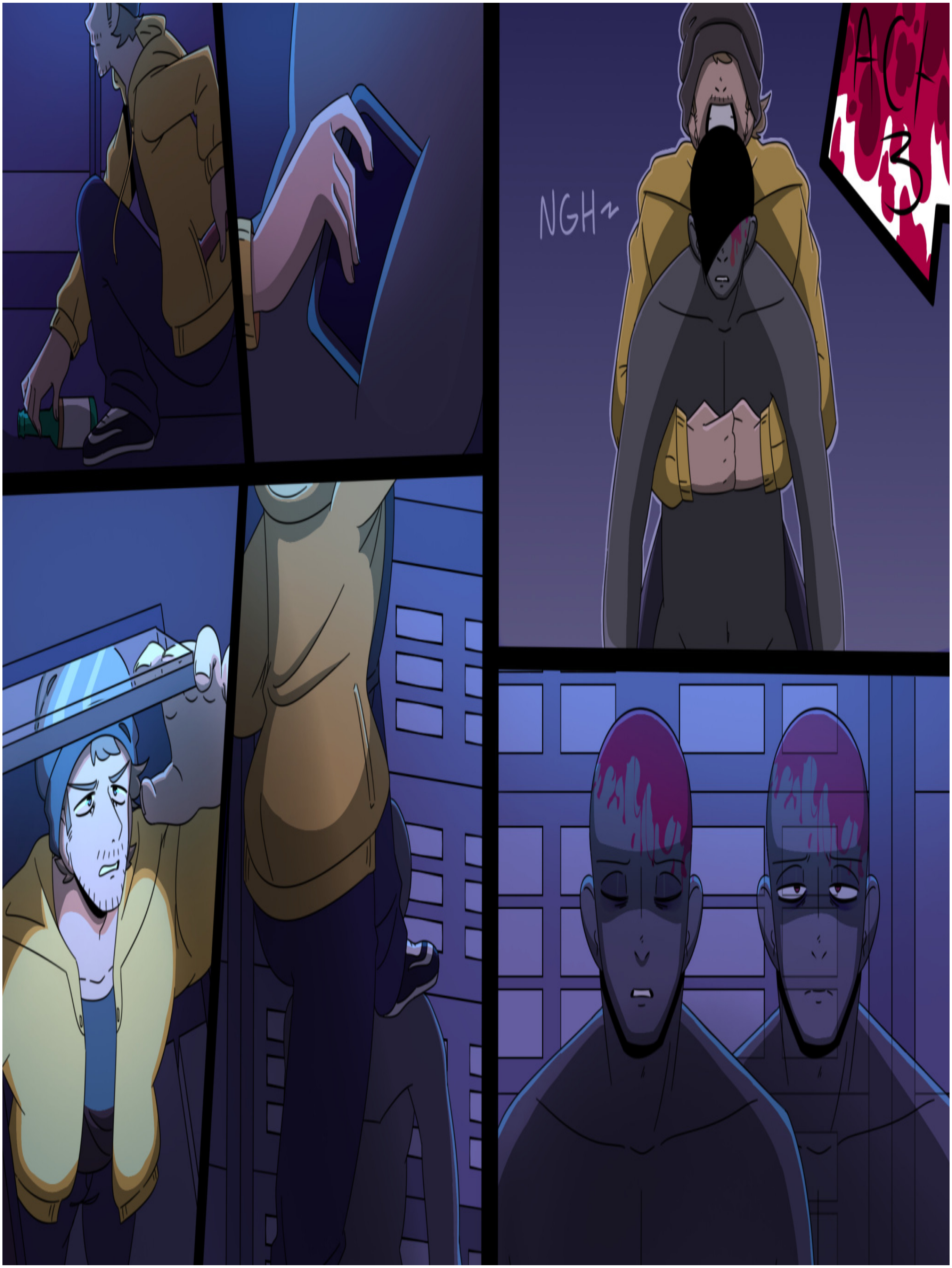
L: “However, just before Jesse could act, Brian had walked into the database. I had tasked him with retrieving some information for our experiment at the VR facility next door, so he was unaware of what had just occurred mere moments ago. Realising if Brian were to stumble upon him or the body of the culprit, Jesse would be in a bad position. Therefore, he quickly decided to take matters into own hands, firstly causing a blackout by pouring beer on the circuit breaker to cause a power surge.”


SMASH
AH?
SMASH
NNNNN~~

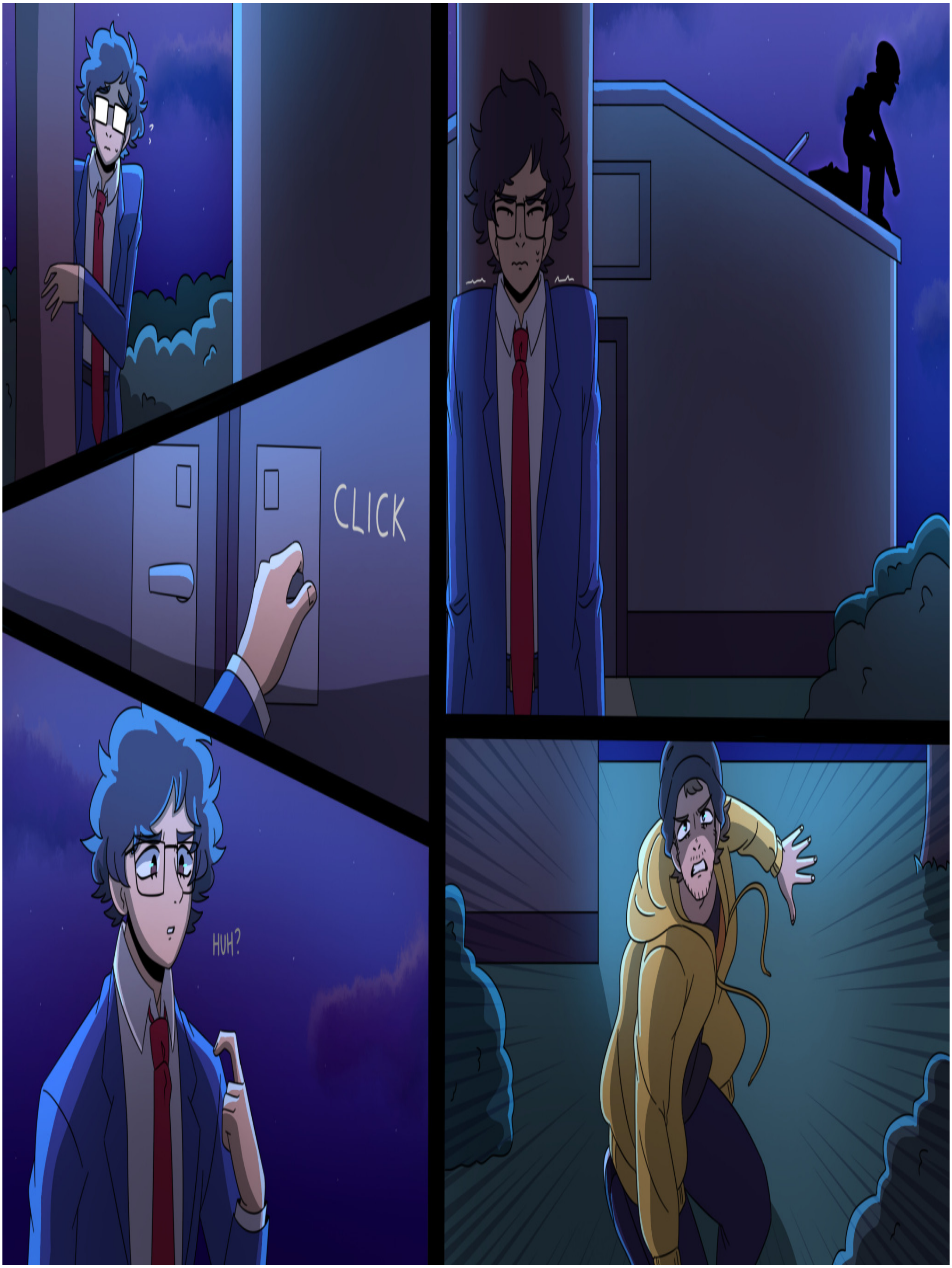
L: “With the power out in the database, it would have been impossible for Brian to see, forcing him to navigate back to the entrance to turn the lights back on. However, Jesse wasn’t finished just yet. His goal was to get Brian out of the database for good. Knowing of his easily paranoid nature, Jesse then smashed a monitor at the back of the database with his own tablet. This would additionally allow him to hide the message of the culprit ever inviting him to the database at all.”


NGH!
PUSH
AHHH~!
BANG
...

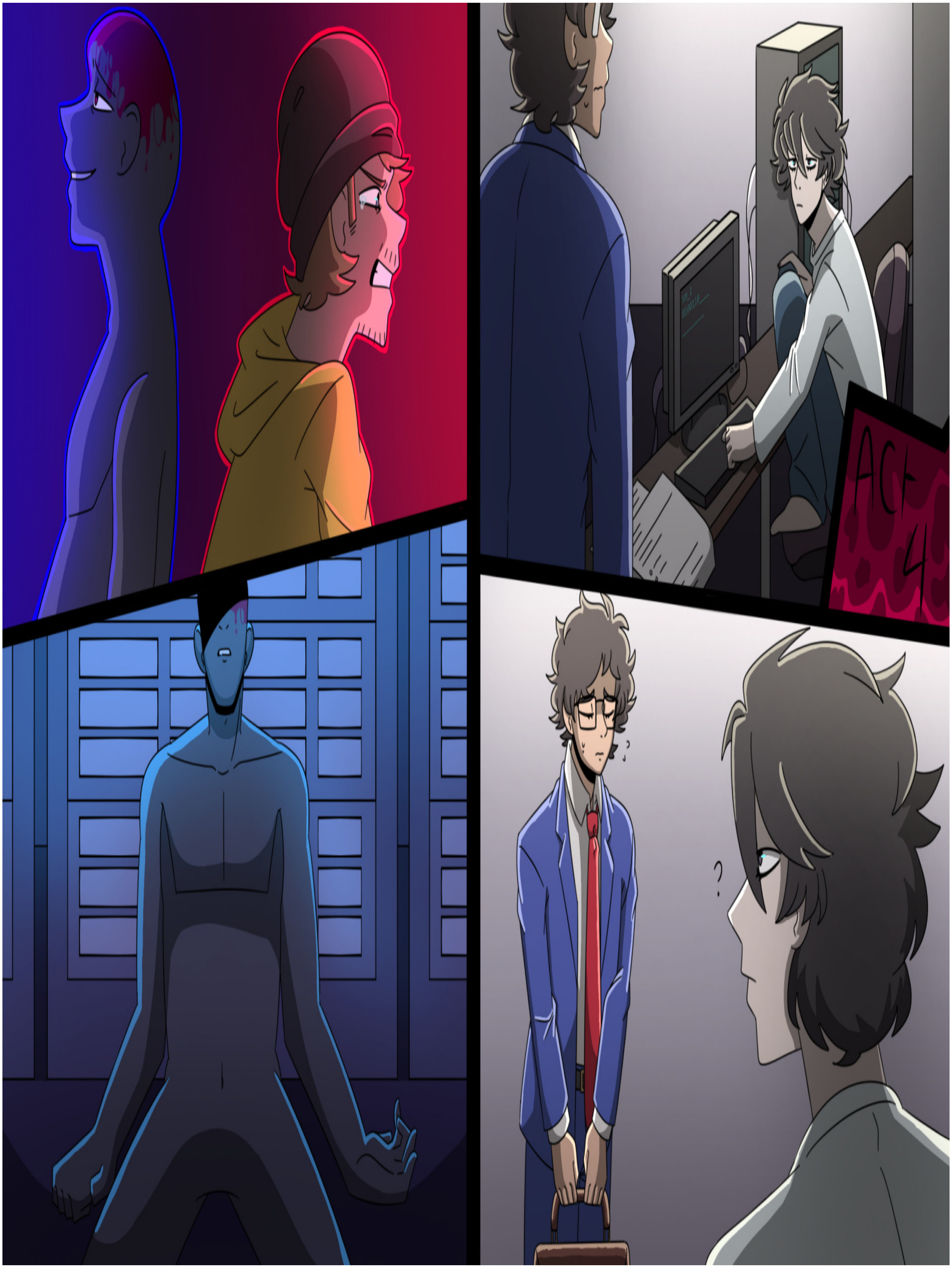
L: “Following such a sudden, startling noise, Brian had been frightened just enough to convince him to flee the database. To ensure Brian could not enter back into the database, Jesse then barricaded the doors with a smaller cabinet nearer to the front entrance. This would unfortunately provide a new dilemma, as he now could not leave the database himself. In search of a different means of escape, Jesse must’ve noticed the roof windows and created a new plan.”


ACT 3
NGH~

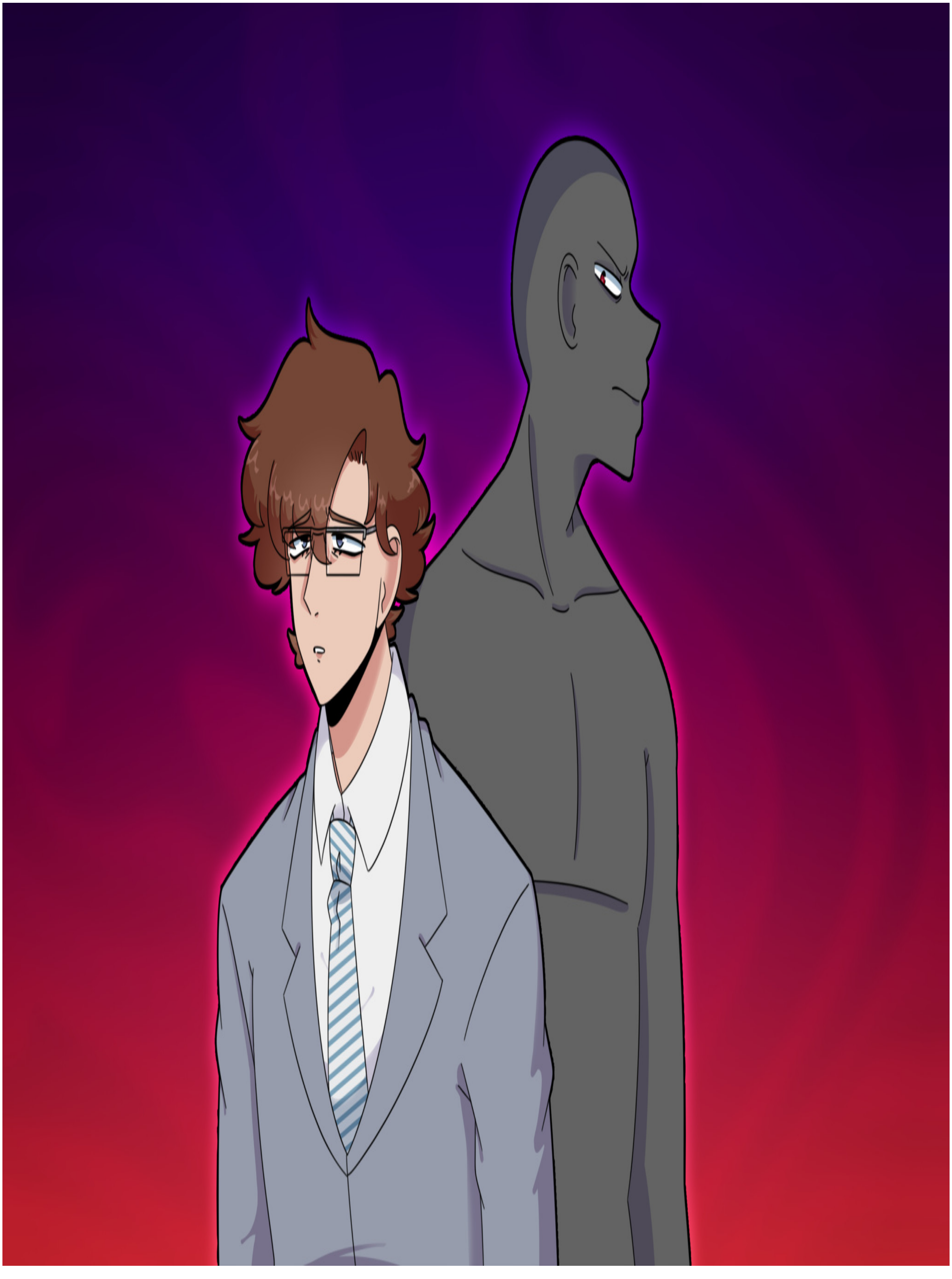
L: “Returning to the culprit, Jesse dragged their body towards a row of servers right below the roof windows. Perhaps in the heat of the moment, Jesse did not consider how it was possible for him to drag the culprit considering their weight. However, what Jesse did not know was that the culprit never truly died from being hit with the cabinet. They were still alive, but as they wished to continue their death, they played dead to allow Jesse to drag them to the servers. Before leaving, Jesse made sure to take all extra alcohol present to hide the fact the culprit was with someone, and the culprit’s tablet to make it appear as if that was the one used to break the monitor. Using the culprit’s own body as a boost up, Jesse climbed onto the servers and escaped the database out of the window. As the windows could only be closed from the inside, Jesse had to leave it open.”


?
CLICK
HUH?

L: “While this was taking place, Brian had been closeby to the database, taking refuge behind a tree. Sometime after Jesse had fled the database himself, Brian had attempted to go back inside, only to find the door had been locked.”


Act 4

L: “Believing his trip unsuccessful, Brian returned to the VR facility to me. Jesse, on the other hand, had believed he had killed the culprit, leaving behind a locked-room mystery due to his impulsive actions. In reality, however, the culprit had simply died on their own terms from alcohol poisoning, some time after Jesse had left the database.”



Hayasaka: (“And that person… That person who even fooled their own friend in order to let himself die on his own terms… was *Bojack Horseman* .”)

COMPLETE

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...”

Monotora: “...It’s so quiet, I can almost hear the waves from the ocean! Guess I’m taking this silence as permission to start the votin’! And that *isn’t* a suggestion this time around.”

Kurumada: “Damnit… Is it alright to vote for someone who’s already dead?”

L: “Bojack is his own killer. It’s the only choice we have.”

Hayasaka: (“The only choice we have…”)

Monotora: “Yeah-yeah-yeah! Let’s get right to it! No screwing around! I’m practically drooling to start! Now then, get out those tablets and vote for who you think’s gone and done it this time! And don’t you dare make me wait, you bastards! Hm, hm, who’s it gonna be? Who’s it gonna be?!”

VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: END!

Monotora: “Let’s get those results in… Hey, won’t ya look at that? A fully unanimous vote this time! Lucky for you fuckers, you got it right once again! The one who killed alcoholic horse-man was… alcoholic horse-man! Gahaha, now that’s a sentence you don’t say every day.”

Jesse: “Did he… really do it? Did Bojack really… die on his own terms…?”

Hands gripped onto his podium to keep himself upright, Jesse neglected to turn to face Monotora, who bobbed their head up and down with a sick enthusiasm.

Monotora: “Nesos picked up the entire thing on camera! Not just that, but we even went n’ checked for ourselves – and wow! You should’a seen the alcohol levels in that meatbag’s system! Shit was off the charts!”

L: “This is new. You’re saying you went to confirm the alcohol concentration in his blood? How would that be possible if the database was locked the entire night?”

Monotora: “Mmmm, Nesos cannot disclose such methods to participants, especially those with freakishly bad posture! Hahaha!”

Monotora’s quip left L unaffected, face as blank as ever. Hayasaka was only barely paying attention, throat dry as he stared towards Jesse. Eventually, he let his eyes drop down to his hands clasped above his torso, as if he’d lost his own privilege to look on any longer.

Brian: “...I would have never guessed. I-I mean, what would… Why would Bojack want to commit suicide in the first place…?”

Kurumada: “To be honest, I always kinda saw Bojack as the nihilistic type…”

Natsuki: “...Hey, Jesse.”

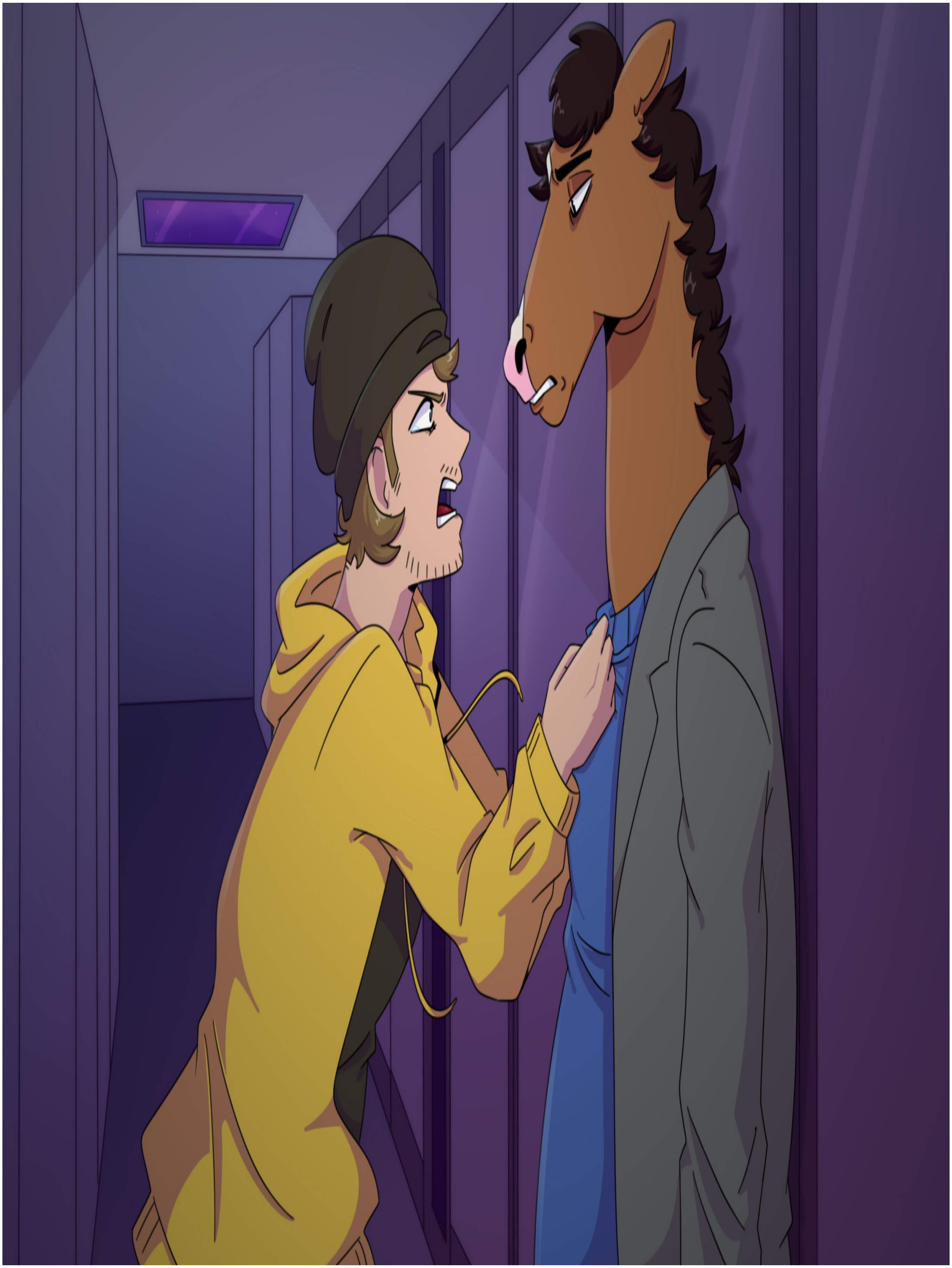
Slowly, Natsuki shuffled over toward Jesse. She placed a gentle hand on his arm.

Natsuki: “Do you have any idea why? Why Bojack would want to… do what he did?”

Jesse turned his head towards her, holding back tremors in his body. Taking in a deep breath, he snuck a glance around the room.

Jesse: “I-I… I don’t know the full story. I just… managed to pry a little outta him when we were fightin’...”

FLASHBACK



Jesse: “Grah!”

Bojack: “Jesse–get off me–!”

Jesse: “No! *No* ! Not until you tell me what the hell you’re doing!”

Bojack: “I thought I made myself pretty clear, so if you can just–”

Jesse: “Shut up, *bitch* ! Why? Why?! Why do you wanna die?!”

Bojack: “I don’t know, Jesse – don’t we all?”

Jesse: “Don’t play smartass with me! Just tell me!”

Bojack: “...Because I’m past the point of no return. Simple as that.”

Jesse: “W-What?”

Bojack: “Jesse, I’ve screwed up so much. And continuing to live now – it’s only going to cause more damage down the line. More than I can ever imagine.”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “...For you, I… I at least wanted to say goodbye to you before doing so. It was the only thing left in my empty pit of a conscience that kept bugging me.”

FLASHBACK END

Jesse: “...That’s all I stopped to hear before try’na drag him out again.”

Latte: “For him to say something like that… Just how long had he been contemplating for…?”

Jesse: “I have no fuckin’ clue. Wish I did. If only he’d come to me with his problems, I could’a helped him. I could’a helped him, before he…”

Hayasaka: (“...It’s never that simple. Those who really wish to take their own life like that, the especially sure ones, can’t be convinced so easily that it’s not the answer. After all…”)

Hayasaka shook the morbid thought from his head.

Hayasaka: (“...Nevermind. I shouldn’t be thinking like that.”)

Monotora: “Bleh! But ain’t it just the worst?! Suicide is one of *the* most selfish things a creature can do! By takin’ your own life, your just riddin’ the opportunity of somebody else doin’ it for you! C’mon, that’s just being damn wasteful!”

Kurumada: “Shut it, asshole. No one asked for *your* take.”

L: “...So then, what happens now?”

Latte: “Huh? What do you mean?”

L: “In each previous trial after we had successfully identified the culprit, they would soon face execution. However, as Bojack, his own killer, is already dead, then what exactly has Nesos planned for such an event?”

Monotora: “Gahaha, aw, is Mr. Sweet tooth dyin’ for an execution? Don’t worry, an execution *will* definitely still happen.”

Brian: “W-What? No, t-that can’t be – who can you even execute?!”

Jesse: “N-No… Are you sayin’... it’s gonna be me? Are you guys gonna kill me after all just ‘cuz I almost killed him myself…?”

Natsuki: “W-Wait! No, y-you can’t do that! That’s not fair! Jesse’s not the true killer!”

Saiki: “ *Nesos has already broken their own rule before. They’d be just as scummy enough to do it again* .”

Monotora: “Yeah, yeah, yap ya damn traps! I don’t care what you all have to say, ‘cuz it’s finally time for an important announcement!”

Hayasaka: “A-An announcement…?”

Monotora: “They’ve been waitin’ a real long time for this moment. So, without further interruption, allow me to reveal a very special guest!”

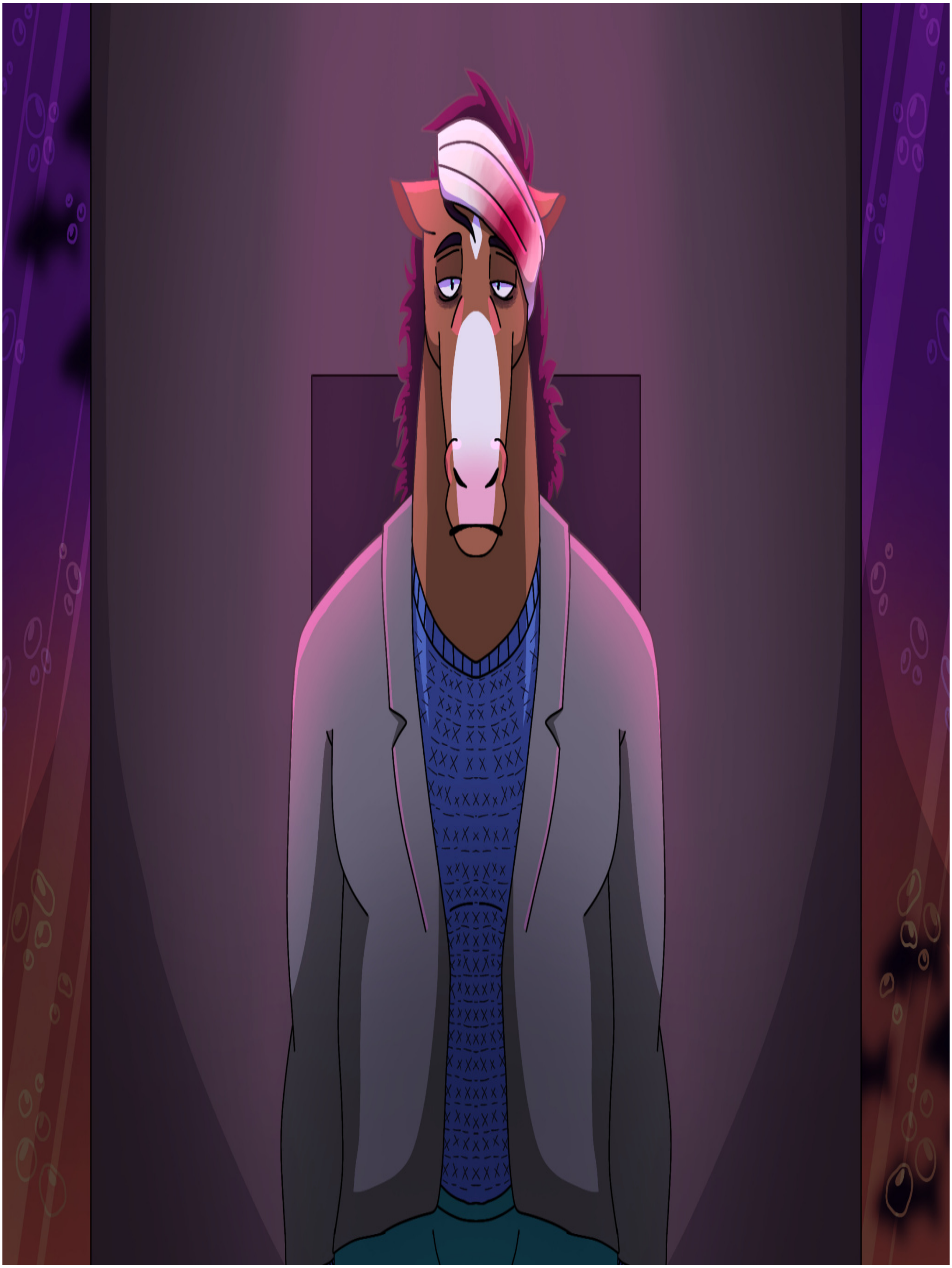
Kurumada: “Eh? What the hell is this now? Don’t start introducin’ random people into our shit!”

Hayasaka: (“ *Special guest* …? I don’t understand. Who could that possibly…”)

Before Hayasaka could even finish his thought, a slim entrance was revealed beside Monotora’s throne. In the dark corridor that stretched so far back into nowhere, the group watched on as someone stepped out into the shimmering lights of the aquarium-like cage. Orange and purple danced across their sunken eyes and dark complexion.

They tried a smile that no-one, too shocked to speak, could return.

And so he dropped it back to his infamous deadpanned frown.



Hayasaka: (“Bo… *Bojack* ?!”)

Eyes darting around the figure in complete and utter confusion, Hayasaka was so close to pinching himself as a reality check. Was this even reality anymore?

Once his eyes landed on the bandage generously covering the head wound he last saw Bojack with, however, the numbers began to add up.

Jesse: “Wh… What the…”

Clearly the most taken-aback, Jesse tried an uncertain step forward, hands practically shaking as he held one out.

Jesse: “B-Bojack, is that… Is that you…? Are you the real Bojack…?”

Glancing towards Jesse, the figure dryly chuckled, as if what Jesse asked was somehow humorous to him.

Bojack: “The one and only Bojack Horseman.”

Hayasaka hadn’t even blinked before Jesse had sprung off his podium, sprinting until he dived straight into Bojack’s chest and wrapping his arms around him so tightly that he stumbled back a few steps with an aspirated breath and a confused grunt.

Bojack: “W-Whoa, hey, uh, c’mon – Jesse, get off me. You know physical contact’s not my thing.”

Jesse: “S-Sorry, man.”

Jesse mumbled as he let go. Yet, he remained as close as he could to Bojack.

Jesse: “I-I’m just, fuck, I’m just so glad to see you again, I-I… You’re alive! You’re okay!”

Bojack: “Do I really look ‘okay’ to you?”

Bojack then gestured to his bandaged wound with a raised brow. Jesse meekly rubbed the back of his neck.

Jesse: “Bojack, I-I… I’m so sorry for what I did to you. Really, I-I was such a dumbass, and I really screwed up big time…”

Bojack: “ *Sigh* , it’s not your fault, Jesse. I should’ve realised you wouldn’t have reacted kindly to the news in the first place. Even if you were drunk. You know, I shouldn’t have planned that part while *I* was drunk, actually.”

Following the silence, Bojack tore his eyes off Jesse to look around at everyone else. They all stared back at him, blanky.

Bojack: “...Why’re you all looking at me like I just died?”

Kurumada: “Because you *did* just die, dumbass! You–You fuckin’ died at the database! How the hell are you even here right now?!”

L: “...Hm. It appears I had made a slight miscalculation.”

Brian: “A-A miscalculation…? *Because I’m seeing more than just that right now…* ”

Bojack: “Look, so uh, funny story. I never actually died from alcohol poisoning. Seemed so easy in the movies. But turns out it’s a bit harder to pull off in real life. As it turns out, I just slipped into a coma. Thankfully not for 30 years. Not, uh, really sure why I’m referencing an ex right now…”

L: “I see. Well, I did think that there was at least a small chance that was the case after all. Although, it’s odd we didn’t catch any signs of you breathing when we were investigating, if you were simply in a coma at the time.”

Monotora: “Hey now, that would’a just spoiled the surprise!”

Saiki: “ *What do you mean ‘surprise’? How would you even cover up such a thing* ?”

Monotora: “Think I’m gonna tell you that for free? Hey, at least cough up some cash or somethin’! Kehehe.”

Bojack: “Eh. Maybe I’m just that good at playing dead. I don’t care. All I know is that I guess I got wrong how much alcohol I needed to *actually* die.”

Hayasaka: “I… I suppose that meant Nesos found that out too?”

Bojack: “They must have, or else I wouldn’t have woken up in a dark infirmary room with this shoddy bandage around my head. Oh, and be forced to watch the last half of this trial go down. You know, I’m pretty impressed how you handled that last part, Hayasaka. Not even I would’ve got that, and I’m the one who did it.”

Hayasaka: “N-No, I… It was nothing, r-really.”

Kurumada: “Like hell it was nothin’. If we all voted for Jesse before I noticed you, we all would’a died.”

Bojack: “Well, thank god that didn’t happen, because I wouldn’t want you all to have died from my own shitty mistake. That would *not* be what I intended to do, at all.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so what… What were your plans, Bojack?”

Bojack: “... *Sigh* , damnit, okay, guess it’s my turn to explain all this shit to you guys.”

Crossing his arms, Bojack stole a glance at Jesse before returning to look around at the group.

Bojack: “If everything did go to plan in the end, Jesse and I would’ve had our final drink together. I would’ve told him I was planning to kill myself. That way, he would’ve been an eye witness to my death. And, when you all would’ve been forced to conduct this trial because of the stupid, shitty rules, Jesse would’ve just told you all what happened and everything would’ve been quickly over.”

Bojack’s eyes trailed down to the ground.

Bojack: “...I just didn’t expect Jesse to react like he did.”

Jesse: “Of course I would’ve, asshole! I-I love you, man. I really felt like I’ve gotten close to you. I… I feel like I can call you one of my closest friends.”

Bojack: “Just to make sure, you meant love in a platonic way, right?”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “...Yeah. Uh, sorry.”

Bojack then sighed.

Bojack: “*... I just don’t understand why* .”

Jesse: “What…? Bojack, did you… not see it the same way? Do I mean nothin’ to you?”

Bojack: “No, no! I did! I did end up enjoying your company in the end, alright? I just–look, deep down, I knew it could have never lasted. Even if you thought it would.”

Jesse: “Huh? What do you mean…?”

Bojack: “I should, uh, probably just come out and say *why* I wanted to kill myself. I’m… broken. Always was. I was broken from birth. Not different, per say, but destined to screw up everything and everyone I met.”

Kurumada: “I mean… Yeah, you *are* an asshole, but you’ve never really done anythin’ *that* irredeemable in my eyes.”

Bojack: “That’s the thing. You don’t know me. You don’t know the full story about me. If anything, you guys hardly know the true Bojack Horseman at all. Just the one you’ve seen on this island. You have no idea what I’ve done before coming here.”

Latte: “Like what…?”

Bojack: “I sabotaged my friend, who was the one to help kick-start my career in the first place, and abandoned him just to benefit myself. I attempted to break up my two other friends just because I was in love with one of them. I’ve ruined the majority of my agent’s life with my own ridiculous bullshit. I’ve betrayed my friend, Todd, on so many occasions that I don’t think I can keep count anymore. I’ve even… killed my own co-star on a bender I *knew* I could have prevented. But I didn’t. All that, and so, so much more.”

A sad smile spread across his lips.

Bojack: “And if I told you what they were, you’d all probably tell me to kill myself too.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Bojack: “...On the island, I tried to repress it. But, the hallucinations only let me remember all the shitty things I had done, and that there was no running away from them. No matter where I am.”

Jesse: “That–That all has jack to do with what you’ve done on the island, though! I’ve done shitty things too, y’know? Who cares?”

Bojack: “Jesse, what’re you talking about? I’ve even done terrible things here on the island too. One of the biggest examples… is Retsuko.”

Brian: “Retsuko…”

Bojack: “I had taken a liking to her. I kept her drinking even though you all wanted us to stop for our own safety from the motive. Even when she wanted to stop as well. I’m selfish like that. If I had never pushed her to keep going, Retsuko would still be alive now.”

Jesse: “Retsuko’s death wasn’t your fault, yo! Even if she wasn’t drinking with you, she still would’a gone to karaoke!”

Bojack: “...Maybe. But, she would’ve had a better chance of saving herself if she wasn’t drunk.”

Saiki: “...”

Bojack: “It wasn’t just Retsuko, but Jesse too. Look, I… I never wanted to befriend you, Jesse. Especially after Walter died. After I tried to help console you during the investigation and trial only to find myself failing miserably, I decided it was best to avoid you altogether. That way, I wouldn’t be able to hurt you anymore.”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “Still, you attempted to befriend me despite everything. And once Retsuko died, I had only merged towards you out of loneliness and grief. Not just that, though. I wasn’t, uh… entirely truthful about that old account with me and Retsuko during the second case. There was something I left out because… I was too afraid to let anyone know.”

Natsuki: “Huh? What did she say?”

Bojack: “...”

FLASHBACK

Retsuko: “...Hey, Bojack?”

Bojack: “Yeah?”

Retsuko: “I’ve just had… something on my mind recently. I think… I think we were too harsh on Jesse.”

Bojack: “What? Come on, you seriously can’t be thinking about that again. That guy’s fine. He’s just acting like a kid.”

Retsuko: “He’s the same age as me! Do you think *I’m* a kid?”

Bojack: “No, but, Retsuko, you’re different–”

Retsuko: “Bojack. Jesse’s lost someone. He’s lost his friend. You don’t think… saying these things about him is out of line?”

Bojack: “...”

Retsuko: “...I’m going to apologise to him tomorrow.”

Bojack: “What?”

Retsuko: “And, I want you to as well. You don’t have to say anything yourself. I can do the talking. But… Please, this death game shouldn’t be pulling us apart. That’s what’s going to get someone killed. Maybe we could even invite him for a drink, too, huh? What do you say? Wouldn’t that be nice? We could get to know him as well.”

Bojack: "..."

Retsuko: "...I see. Well, it was worth a shot, right? Haha."

FLASHBACK END

Bojack: "...Maybe what she said had something to do with it, too."

Hayasaka: ("For Retsuko to have planned such a thing, despite not knowing of her fate…")

Bojack: "And then, well, I forgot entirely that I was supposed to be avoiding you. So we got caught up in our antics together. Only then was I snapped out of this fantasy when you tried to fight that tiger."

Jesse: "..."

Latte: "Wait, Jesse, what's he talking about? When did this happen?"

Natsuki: "Two nights ago. Jesse tried to go against Monotora, b-but…"

Bojack: "But it was just a trick to get that thing to kill him."

Brian: "W-What?!"

Hayasaka: ("Ah god, seems this has come out to everyone now…")

Jesse: "Argh, it–it doesn't matter! It was just some stupid hallucination gettin' to me, alright?"

Bojack: “And it wouldn’t have happened at all if you never had that argument with me beforehand.”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “...Once I realised I had almost inadvertently got you killed, I finally understood. I finally understood I couldn’t live any longer and put other’s lives in danger. Because I’m a selfish asshole. Because I’m a stupid piece of shit.”

Natsuki: “T-That’s…”

Kurumada: “...So what made you wanna choose the database of all places to die in?”

Bojack: “I don’t know. I just assumed it was the most secluded place where no one else could have run into me or Jesse at the time. I thought no one was in favour of going back to that VR place after our first run, so I thought that island was free game. ‘Course, I had no idea detective brainiac and his assistant were just next door. Kind of sounds comical now, doesn’t it?”

L: “...Comedy is subjective.”

Bojack: “Yeah. Especially right now. *Figures* .”

Bojack’s awkward mutter hung in the air as the group sank into silence again. The words he fumbled out were stilted, vulgar, and downright inappropriate. All this pent up meaning took its weight on everyone else. A heavy load that really shouldn’t have been dumped like that. And yet, what did Bojack have to lose now? Hayasaka couldn’t speak for everyone else, but his stomach had dropped, accompanied with an uncomfortable tightness in his chest over what had come to light.

Hayasaka: (“...I never realised how messed up Bojack truly was. Sure, I overheard his story of Sara Lynn before this, but I didn’t know just how much else he was involved in. However… even I could argue that Retsuko’s death wasn’t his fault. It wasn’t even Kaidou’s. It was Nesos. The motive they gave. The situation they put us in. The whole death game in the first place. That’s– That’s who we should blame, shouldn’t we…?”)

While everyone could hardly move, one was still persistent. Jesse, eyebrows furrowed at Bojack, shook his head.

Jesse: “No, I… I’m no different from you, Bojack. I’m just as fucked up as you are, man. You ain’t the only one who–”

Bojack: “No, Jesse. I was born broken. I can tell you’re not. You were only raised as so.”

Jesse: “No! *No* ! I’m–I’m not! I… I… *Hic* , I…”

Jesse couldn’t say anything else. Maybe he had nothing else he could say. Eventually, his sputtered words broke down into quiet sobs. Eyes darting back and forth from Jesse to the aquarium walls, Bojack lifted a hand out, only to drop it in uncertainty.

Monotora: “... *Siiiiigh* . Are we done now? Is the sappy stuff finally over now?”

Glancing over at Monotora, Hayasaka noticed they wore an almost bored expression, eye half-lidded and tapping their claws against the armrest of their throne chair.

Brian: “What do you want now?”

Monotora: “Oh, I know you know what I want. I wanna finally chomp down on some flesh! I wanna pierce a nice hole through someone’s gut! I *want* the execution to start soon!”

Natsuki: “A-Are you kidding me? Who’s even gonna die anyway?”

Jesse: “I’ll die! Bojack should get this opportunity to keep living! That way, he–”

Bojack: “ *Jesse* . There’s no way in hell that’s ever going to happen. No, I’m the one that should die. I’m the one who wanted to in the first place. And, I still do.”

Jesse: “No… No you don’t!”

Bojack: “Why the hell do you think I played dead before, Jesse?”

Jesse: “You just didn’t want to fight me, asshole! You were being a coward–”

Bojack: “I didn’t want you to get in the way of what was right for the both of us!”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “Jesse, look. I’m… I’m sorry I tricked you. I just… didn’t want to cause any more damage I already had. I’d rather you go on to think you killed me, than you keep me alive at all.”

Jesse: “B-Bojack…”

Bojack: “Hell, it’s not like we have a choice, either. Since I was my own killer, er, technically if I was to actually die back then, it should be the only way.”

Monotora: “Hehehe… Hahaha… Gahahaha!”

Saiki: “ *What’s so funny now* ?”

Monotora: “Aw, you sucker. It wasn’t a choice in the first place! We’ve already got an execution prepared for ol’ alcoholic horse, fresh n’ ready to go!”

L: “I assume that’s because, as Bojack said, he is his own killer, no matter how you look at it?”

Monotora: “Yeah, a lil’ bit of that. But, are you seriously going to forget the terrible, no-good thing you committed on this island? Ya know… that *rule* you broke?”

Brian: “He… broke a rule? W-Which one?”

Monotora: “Remember when you smashed that bottle over my head?”

FLASHBACK

Natsuki: “Pick up the *fucking* hammer and fight back you *dumbass* !”

Despite Natsuki’s wild screams, Jesse simply rolled his eyes over to the two.

Jesse: “Heh… *It doesn’t matter anymore.* ”

A vacant smile plastered along his dry lips.

Jesse: “ *Nothing matters anymore* .”

Hayasaka almost screamed when Monotora jumped up for the second attack.

Almost .

???: “GAH!”

SMASH

Monotora: “Argh– *fuck* ! Fucking– *Damnit* !”

Broken glass went flying everywhere. All at once, a bottle was smashed over Monotora's head, causing their mechanical body to jolt unnaturally as they stumbled off. Mouth widened in shock and astonishment, Jesse's eyes peered upwards until he saw the perpetrator of the act.

Jesse: " *Bojack* ?"

FLASHBACK END

Monotora: "That, may I remind ya slow ass, was a clear example of violence against your island rep, Monotora! Rule number four – ringing any bells? That, alongside what ya did in the case, is why Bojack will die."

Jesse: "No… No, damnit, no! C'mon, that's not–! Just a rule? Well–Well *I* broke a rule too, didn't I? I broke my own tablet! Hey, doesn't that count? I broke your property!"

Monotora: "Breakin' tablets ain't against the rules, bozo! We would'a just handed ya a new one – and taken it outta ya paycheck – but seein' as you've already provided yourself with a replacement… Mwehe~"

Jesse: "N…No! *No* !"

Shaking his head more violently than before, Jesse clenched his fists as he wildly stared at Monotora.

Jesse: "Bojack can't die! He can't! I can't let someone else close to me die again! I don't– *I don't wanna be alone again* !"

Trembling, Jesse grabbed his beanie, crumpling his fingers around it as his cries echoed around the room. Bojack, confused, held his hands out in an attempt to calm him down.

Bojack: "Jesse, hey, c'mon. That's–you've seen me die once before, right? It shouldn't be so hard to watch it again."

Yet his words of consolement did nothing for Jesse, who continued to sob into himself. Growing anxious, Bojack flicked his eyes around.

Latte: “Would you just hug him already?!”

Following Latte’s stern interjection, Bojack sucked in a breath as he awkwardly stepped closer to Jesse, wrapping his arms around his back and pulling him into an embrace.

Bojack: “Jesse… Do you remember that promise you made me? That you wouldn’t get yourself into trouble again? Well, do you think you could add an extra on top of that for me?”

Jesse: “Hn…?”

Bojack: “Survive to the end. You, and everyone else, you’re going to escape this death game, before death even has the chance to take you. And, kick Nesos’ goddamn ass.”

Jesse: “...”

Bojack: “Oh, and while you’re at it, don’t, uh, sulk in your room for the next day or two over me, alright? Or else I’ll be mad from whatever afterlife is in store for me.”

Jesse remained quiet. He let his head lie on Bojack’s shoulder, taking in his words. Soon, he closed his eyes, nodding his head.

Bojack: “...Great, great. And, hey, you won’t be alone, Jesse. You have her.”

Bojack then gestured over to Natsuki, who widened her eyes at the unexpected attention. Easing herself, she shuffled over to the two.

Bojack: “Hey, take care of him when I’m gone, alright? In the very small time we’ve spent together, I can tell you two get along well. And, uh, you probably need a friend too after all that shit you went through, anyway.”

Fiddling with her hands, she nodded, flashing a sympathetic smile towards the two.

Then, to Bojack’s surprise, Jesse took it upon himself to break the hug. Shakily, he wiped away his tears with his hoodie’s sleeve, only for more to start welling up that he held back with a few blinks.

Jesse: “I… I know I can't change what's gonna happen. Even if I really want to. So… if that's what you want, then I’ll have to accept it. But, I will keep the promise. Ain’t nothin’ gonna get in the way of that."

Bojack nodded.

Bojack: "You know, if things were different, if *I* was different, I wouldn't have minded continuing this. Our friendship, I mean."

Jesse: "Don't say that, man. You're gonna make me start cryin' again."

Following Jesse's small smile with a shake of his head, Bojack couldn't help but smile back. Quickly, though, his face dropped back into a frown. Taking a step back, he turned towards Monotora. Then, he proceeded to rip off his bandage.

Bojack: "Alright, you sack of shit. Get it over with, before I actually manage to change my mind or something."

Monotora: "Oh? Is that it? Is that permission to get things rolling? You don't gotta tell me twice, kehe!"

Springing up, Monotora cleared their throat.

Monotora: "Now then, we've prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Actor, Bojack!"

Bojack: "It was nice knowing you all. Even if I didn't really contribute much to your escape plans. I just wish you all the best, and that hopefully my death doesn't deter you too much. Though, I know it probably won't."

Monotora: "It's time to play with my prey! IT'S PUNISHMENT TIME!!"

Bojack: "Huh. *I suppose I don't mind going out with a bang* ."

PUNISHMENT TIME!! [VIDEO]

Monotora: “Gahaha! Did ya get an eyeful of his face just then? Ol’ alcoholic horse really thought he had a damn chance of escape back there!”

L: “Hardly.”

Monotora: “Eh?”

L: “It was always Bojack’s intention to die from the start.”

Kurumada: “What d’ya mean by that?”

L: “The appearance of the pill bottle atop the pool should make it obvious.”

Hayasaka: (“...Ah, I see. Bojack took the pills before he even plunged into the pool. That’s…”)

Hayasaka lacked the energy to finish his thought. Although his execution was not as openly brutal as the others, Bojack’s death still left an imprint on his mind. The way he accepted his fate. The way he let himself fall back into the water. Dragging him into nothing but the open invitation of death. So, so willingly. Hell, they could’ve just handed him that pill bottle right in the trial grounds and he would’ve downed them like it was no problem.

So brave.

A cold sweat ran down the back of Hayasaka’s neck.

Jesse: “... *Why … W-Why …*”

Hayasaka's ears pricked up as he shot his eyes over to Jesse. Just like before, he repeated the same word, over and over again. Was it a coincidence? Or was it merely subconscious? Clenching his fists so hard it looked as if they were going to snap, Jesse shook, muffled tears staining his cheeks once again. His eyes were so red. Softly, Natsuki moved closer to him, rubbing tender circles into his back.

Monotora: "Ahahaha! Well, that confirms it! Now there's only exactly half of you bastards left! Kinda feel like I've cut ya clean down the middle. How low, I wonder, will they drop now? Hehehe~"

Hayasaka: ("Only half…?")

Hayasaka whipped his head around. And then once more. Every mental headcount he tried only brought back the same result.

Hayasaka: ("That's… No… There's only half of us? We've lost… that many people?")

Kurumada: "There's no way I can believe that… Fuck! You Nesos bastards are gonna pay for all this shit!"

Monotora: "Well excuse me! If anything, I think you'll find it's your fault for wanting to murder each other so badly in the first place!"

L: "Such a bold claim. And yet, do you believe this will last any longer?"

Monotora: "Hrm?"

L: "Perhaps you've become ignorant to the resolve. Or, you simply don't want to face reality. Regardless, Nesos will not be able to stay safe for much longer. I intend to uncover the mystery of who you truly are very soon."

Monotora: " *Pffft* –Gahahaha! Oh god, c'mon – one more, one more time! Please?! That was just so fuckin' hilarious! I wanna hear it again! I mean, really, I'm *sooo scared* over here!"

Brian: “You better be! Because–Because I’m going to work to expose Nesos too!”

Latte: “I’m with you on that one! We will fight for the others who you’ve made suffer!”

Saiki: “ *There’s no hiding behind your death game anymore* .”

Natsuki: “Yeah! We’re gonna show them, right Jesse?”

Jesse: “Yeah… Yeah! We’re gonna make you our bitch, *bitch* !”

Kurumada: “Hell yeah, now this is a good idea I can get behind!”

One by one, everyone chimed in to say something against Monotora, Nesos, and everything in between. Hayasaka looked towards each of them and held back his shaken state with a nod of approval.

Hayasaka: (“That’s right… Although it’s tough, I know the pain has gone on far enough. From now on, we can’t play Nesos’ game any longer. We’re going to escape. *And we’re going to live* .”)

…

Hayasaka: (“...Right?”)

***

Waves crashed out into the open horizon, simmering into the shore with a white froth. Back and forth, they carried. Back and forth, Hayasaka’s eyes idly followed along. The water drew him in, every so often matching his breathing to the motion of the waves. From afar, the soft glow of the sunset warmed his cheeks.

As he began to slowly let his eyes shut, however, he heard soft footsteps approach him. They stopped right beside him, where he felt a familiar presence linger with their arms crossed. Turning his head to greet them, they cocked a brow.

Kurumada: “Well then, what’re you doing all the way out here?”

Hayasaka: “Haa… Just watching the waves. After that trial, I really need some piece of mind.”

Kurumada: “No kidding. That was a shitshow n’ a half. Heh, can’t believe not one, but two people were caught by that motive to try n’ take their own life.”

Hayasaka: “...”

All at once, Hayasaka’s heart rate increased. Staring blankly back out into the ocean, and watching how it glimmered back, he closed his eyes.

Hayasaka: “...T-Three. There were… three.”

A sharp turn caught Hayasaka off guard, turning to look back at Kurumada only to falter. His eyes were wide, stunned, a deep frown etched on his lips. Never had he seen him so *afraid* before.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka, what… what the hell do you mean by that…?”

Something about his fearful demand made Hayasaka unable to look him in the eye.

Hayasaka: “You remember that Mai hallucination, right? Well, I suppose she got to me. Not just her, but even Gin managed to show up, too. She guided me towards the kitchen, made me hold a knife right to my own neck. I was so scared, yet, I couldn’t stop myself from listening to the things she said. It feels like I can hardly remember them now. If it wasn’t for Saiki suddenly stepping in, I’m not sure what would’ve happened…”

Only silence followed his words. Peeking back over at Kurumada, he could only look back in horror. Hayasaka wrung his cuffs, lowering his head.

Hayasaka: “I-I’m sorry. I was just so weak. I let myself fall for such a pathetic attempt on my own life– *huh* ?”

Before Hayasaka knew it, Kurumada had pulled him into a tight embrace. Arms gripped tightly around him, Kurumada dug his chin into his shoulder.

Kurumada: “ *I’m so fucking glad you’re okay* .”

Hayasaka: “W-What…? Are you not angry…?”

Kurumada: “I am. I’m so fuckin’ angry. But, the relief I’m feeling: it’s so much stronger.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Hey, you’re not gonna do it again, are you? It was just ‘cuz of the hallucination, weren’t it? You don’t–you know…”

Hayasaka could feel Kurumada’s grip tighten, voice becoming softer.

Hayasaka: “I-I won’t. I made a promise… You know, to…”

Kurumada: “Well can ya promise me?”

Hayasaka let his tired eyes close once again.

Hayasaka: “... *I promise* .”

Kurumada: “Heh. Good.”

Hayasaka: “...A-Again, I can’t tell you how sorry I am that–”

Kurumada: “Don’t apologise. Stop apologising for things that ain’t your fault. It’s all Nesos. They’re the ones responsible for everything that’s happened.”

Hayasaka: “Why?”

Kurumada: “Why what?”

Hayasaka: “Why do we keep putting the blame on them? When will our actions be accounted for by our own decisions?”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka… You’re thinking about it the wrong way. You’re changing, and Nesos are afraid of that. So, they’re just upping their attack, adding more roadblocks to your journey. No one wants to go down with an easy fight.”

Hayasaka: “H-Haha… I don’t know what you mean. I haven’t changed a bit.”

Kurumada: “You say that, but the old Hayasaka wouldn’t have told me what you did earlier.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Gently, Kurumada let go, stepping back to allow him some space.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. I want you to tell me more things, all things, and I’ll do the same. No secrets will be kept from each other from now on, alright?”

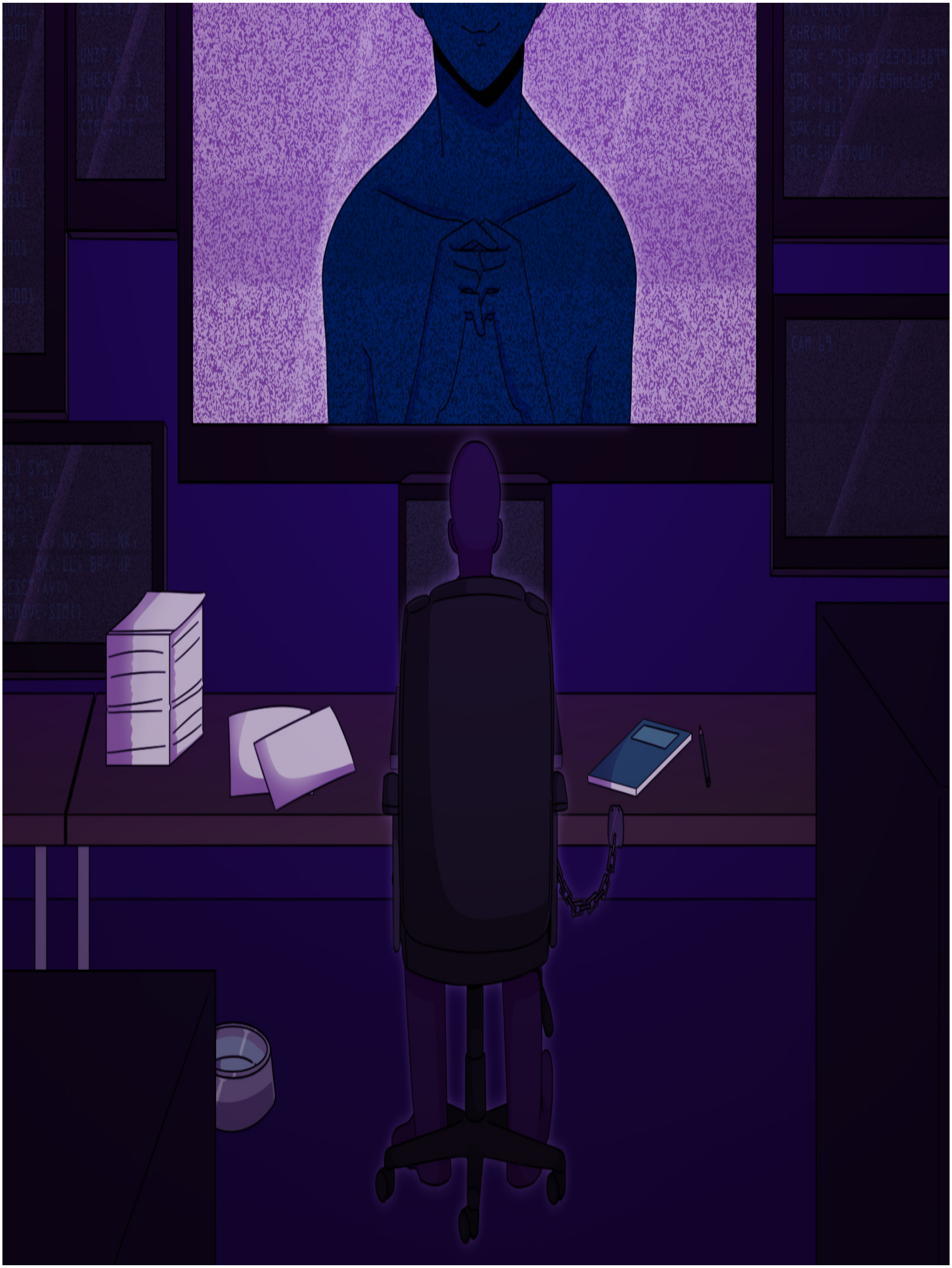
As the waves washed against the orange sand, Hayasaka pondered on the others' proposal. Just as a small drop of water flicked against his loafers, he smiled.

Hayasaka: “Yes, that’s… that’s a good idea.”

Taking no moment to think about it, he let himself lean against Kurumada. In turn, he wrapped an arm around his shoulder. As they stared out into the slowly dimming sun, they could feel the presence of someone alongside them.

She stood close, smiling to them sweetly.

***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SPK.fail
SPK.fail
SPK.SHUTDOWN()
CAM 69
OLD SYS.
PN();
RESET.AV()
REMOVE.SIM()

???#1: “So, that was an… interesting trial.”

???#2: “Ah, yep…! I hope it made sense. Usually the victim and culprit aren’t the same person.”

???#1: “I think I get it. Considering we saw the whole thing go down on camera anyway, it’s not a big deal to me.”

???#2: “...Are you happy it wasn’t… you know…?”

???#1: “Happy wouldn’t be the right word. But I am glad.”

???#2: “You look happy, hehe.”

???#1: “Hey, well, someone died. Let’s not change the subject here.”

???#2: “Sorry, sorry~”

???#1: “...Oh, by the way, what’s the progress on our operation looking like?”

???#2: “Ah, it’s taking a long time. It’s a very complex security system.”

???#1: “The encryption on that thing is nuts. I really don’t blame you.”

???#2: “I’m gonna try my hardest to get it cracked as soon as possible, though! Just sit tight, okay?”

???#1: “It’s not like I can exactly go anywhere else.”

CLANK

???#2: “Ah… Yeah. So, what are you gonna do now?”

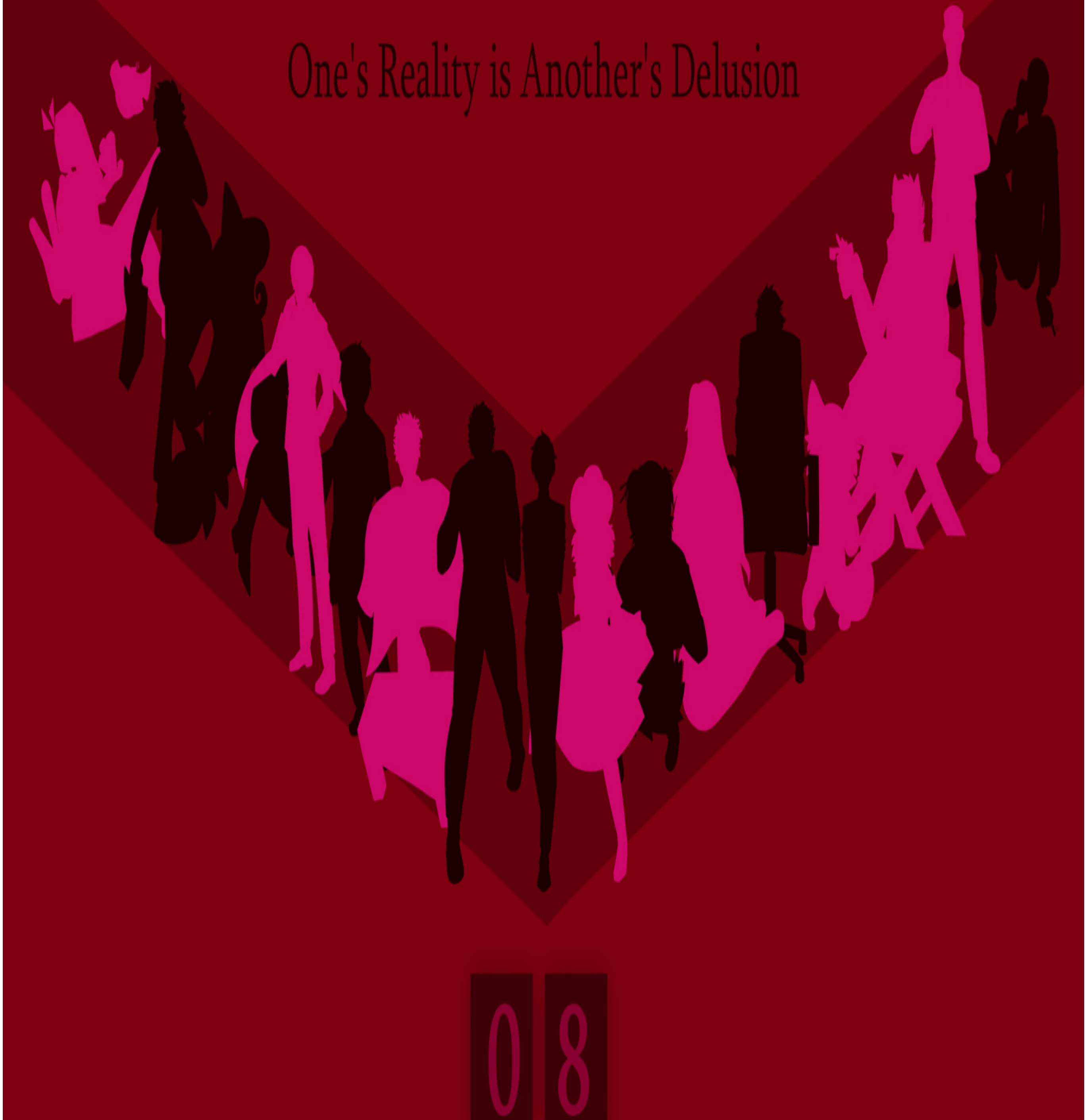
???#1: “Probably just gonna keep my eye on you-know-who for a while – make sure they’re alright after that whole trial thing.”

???#2: “You really are doing a lot for them, huh?”

???#1: “...Maybe. I’m just returning a favour, after all.”

CHAPTER 4

One's Reality is Another's Delusion



08

Chapter End Notes

You when you waited a year only for a horse to die twice: ok how do I unsubscribe (/j.... hopefully)

Back in da 90s, he was in a very famous TV show.... I wonder how much the tape for his execution will sell online these days-

Speaking of the execution, there is a reason why it's shorter than the others, and that being that it's only fair since Bojack's already 'died' once here. Also, the dude just wanted to get it over with already.

Well, I really hope you enjoyed the trial! AND the new trial minigame that's in a video format how insane I'm blowing up as we speak. Many'a twists, many'a turns eh? Cough. OH and who the hell are those 2 at the end?! I didn't invite them here (hm or maybe I did hehe)

Guess you know what time it is now... The FINAL FTE voting for Chapter 5!! Ough we've come so far so wide but alas, only the TOP 3 characters will have their Free Time Event be shown in Chapter 5 Daily! The 6 of 'em will really be fightin' (yes, since Saiki's FTEs have already been maxed out, he won't be in the vote. How fitting for him even if he does like Hayasaka lmao)

LINK TO POLL: [CLOSED - sorry!]

Again, tyvm for reading! Have a wonderful day or night, wherever you are!

Chapter 5: The Fault in Our Scars (Daily Life)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> what do you MEAN it's been two years and the story's not over yet
>
> hey guys how's it goin it's ya bestest friend in the whole world that you only see every 6 months (I flutter my eyelashes)
>
> If you didn't know, this time we actually began production on the entirety of chapter 5 in late October, and it only took us (reads notes) 5 months? So if you think about it, it's only really like 2 weeks
>
> Regardless, we appreciate all the support and encouragement we've received during this time! ❤️
>
> So in recent news my proseka luck has risen! I managed to snatch both Kanade and Ena in the samsa gacha in under 3 ten pulls (let's hope I can keep this luck for the limited Ena for the next gacha that is literally dropping the exact same time I post this chapter what they hell) <- incomprehensible words to a non-proseka player
>
> I really hope you enjoy the chapter (clocking in at 24k words) ^^ let's see what the ninety-sixers will get up to this time...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“...Ah, Brian, I’ve been meaning to ask you something. I don’t mean to recall the time you slipped on the beach, but it made me wonder if you’ve ever been on vacation before. You had mentioned something about ‘not being used to beaches’...”

“So you remember that, huh? Yeah, I’ve never really had the opportunity to, u-unless you count this one being my first. Which…isn’t all that great to say the least. But, the fact that you woke up here with two friends by your side must’ve been relieving.”

“...I must admit, I’m truly lucky to have them here with me. I’m sure I’d hardly know how to handle everything by myself otherwise.”

“...”

“Ah, um, Brian, I didn’t mean to insist that…”

“...N-No, it’s fine. I’m used to doing things alone. I’m actually pretty thankful that you came to talk to me – you’re the first person here to really do that.”

…

Brian: “Phoof… What a trial. I wasn’t expecting something like that to happen. I guess I should’ve been prepared to be suspected like that, but I’m glad I had Hayasaka and L to stick up for me…”

…

Brian: “And… If Hayasaka hadn’t managed to figure out the truth… Well, I-I suppose L would’ve had to step in eventually.”

…

Brian: “...Haah. It’s so nice to have them to rely on. Not just in the trials, but…”

…

Brian: “...I wonder how my friends are doing back at Sintracorp? Worried sick, I bet. Still, I’m alive, so that’s… something. And, I’m not alone anymore. I have people I can rely on in this crazy situation. We’re all suffering, but we understand each other… It’s a new feeling. But, I’m happy to have it.”

…

Brian: “...Nothing will stop us from being friends, right?”

***

Hayasaka: “....”

…

Hayasaka: “... *Hn* …”

Light seeped into Hayasaka’s eyelids, pulling him out of his rest. His hand lifted above his head as the sound of the rustling bedsheets tickled his ears. Gently opening his eyes, he quickly picked up on how warm he was. The bedsheets were thin, designed to combat coolness against the humidity of the island. So, why was he much warmer than usual? Had he gained a sudden fever?

???: “ *Nnn …*”

A low groan caught his attention as he turned his head to the other side of the bed. Hayasaka’s eyes widened: he wasn’t alone. In fact, he was quite close to somebody else.

Glancing down, he saw his inner arm and leg entangled with Kurumada’s.

For a while, Hayasaka simply gazed at the other. Kurumada had both arms wrapped around his own, although loose enough that he was sure he could slip away unnoticed. Yet frankly, he didn't mind staying put.

Hayasaka: ("Of course… That's right. Kurumada didn't want to leave me alone after last night. I let him inside my room so he could 'keep an eye on me', par his own words. I… suppose we eventually must've fallen asleep…")

Hayasaka turned his head back, so that he was facing the ceiling. The pillow felt softer than usual. The air felt lighter than usual. Didn't someone just die yesterday? So then, why did everything feel so fine in this moment?

Hayasaka: ("Should I wake him up…? He looks rather peaceful. I hope he's been sleeping well before this.")

Almost subconsciously, Hayasaka's hand reached over to Kurumada. A few fingers brushed lightly against his cheek. Hayasaka leaned in closer.

DING DONG, BING BONG

Kurumada: " *Grah* –!"

Hayasaka: "Hah–!"

Jumping back, Hayasaka rubbed his neck as he heard the morning announcement ring out somewhat louder than it usually did. Or, maybe he had been in silence for so long that any sound had become louder to his ears. From the corner of his eye, he saw Kurumada sit up and run a hand through his hair.

Kurumada: "Fuckin' hell…"

Kurumada's eyes dragged across the bed until they landed on Hayasaka.

Kurumada: “Oh.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Good morning.”

Kurumada: “Heh. And what a good morning it is.”

Hayasaka: “U-Um?”

Kurumada: “Uh… Hey, where are your glasses?”

At his shoddy attempt to change the topic, Hayasaka let out a soft sigh. He reached for his glasses on the bedside table, making a show of putting them on.

Hayasaka: “Thank you for… accompanying me for the night. But, ah, we should really get ready now.”

Kurumada: “Huh? Already?”

Hayasaka: “We don’t… want the others to worry about where we are, right?”

Kurumada: “...I guess. But I take it ya don’t mind if someone spots us comin’ outta the same room together?”

The realisation hit Hayasaka, making his face flush. Kurumada just chuckled.

Kurumada: “I was just kiddin’. I wanna head to my room to take a quick shower, anyway.”

Kurumada swung his legs over the bed and jumped up.

Kurumada: “Got a real nice bed, though.”

Hayasaka: “We all have the same bed, Kurumada.”

Kurumada laughed again.

Kurumada: “See ya down, Hayasaka.”

And he was gone. And just like that, the pillow was no longer soft. The air was no longer light. The slice-of-life, feel-good scene had come to a close. The situation crept back up Hayasaka, reminding him where he was, what he was up against, and what he had lost so far.

He threw his head back against the headrest a little tougher than he should’ve.

Walter, Hiroshi…

Hayasaka stepped into the restaurant.

Retsuko, Kaidou …

He made his way to the kitchen with tense steps.

Ena, Yuri, Mai …

He placed a hand on the doorframe.

Bojack …

???: “Shit…!”

Hayasaka shot his eyes towards a certain man, fumbling around with the coffee machine. Some coffee had spilt onto his sleeve, the man ever-so intelligently sucking on the fabric only to wince at the bitter taste of full-black coffee.

Hayasaka: “Jesse…?”

Jesse: “Mr. Hayasaka? Ah, damnit.”

Jesse’s shoulders dropped as he slumped against the counter.

Jesse: “So much for a surprise, I guess.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? What do you mean?”

Taking a few steps forward, Hayasaka tilted his head. Jesse grabbed the carton of milk resting on the counter and poured a generous amount into the mug.

Jesse: “Like, uh, I wanted to give thanks. And, seein’ as you always have a coffee every morning, I thought I could get down here first and make one for you.”

Hayasaka: “A thank you for what?”

Jesse: “You know… the trial. You beat my dumbass logic, and you saved us all. Even when I was bein’ such an asshole to you. You even allowed me to see Bojack one last time. That’s… mad respect, yo.”

Jesse handed him the coffee mug, but Hayasaka only shook his head.

Hayasaka: “Jesse, no, I… I hardly did anything. Kurumada was the one to stop the vote, and I needed L to help me pinpoint what I was even unsure of.”

But, Jesse only shrugged, and forced him to take the mug.

Jesse: “Not how I see it. Still, I've been meaning to do this ever since Mr. White’s trial…”

Hayasaka: (“Ever since then, huh…?”)

Glancing down into his skewed reflection in the mug, Hayasaka took a sip.

Hayasaka: “Thank you, Jesse…”

Jesse: “No worries, Mr. Hayasaka.”

For some reason, those words made Hayasaka falter from taking another sip. Jesse must’ve noticed the energy in his eyes waver, as his brow furrowed in confusion.

Hayasaka: “Jesse… Why are you so insistent on calling me Mr. Hayasaka? We’re around a close age, and I’m hardly a few years older than you for such a title to be considered.”

Jesse: “I dunno, man. I guess it’s ‘cuz you remind me a shit ton of Mr. White.”

Hayasaka: “I do…?”

Jesse: “Yeah. I mean, you’re all formal and shit like him, have this sense of authority and responsibility about you like he did, hell, I even thought you were a teacher when I first met you. You even kinda look like Mr. White before he shaved his head due to the cancer diagnosis…”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Jesse: “So, I guess I’m just making shitty parallels, but you do remind me a lot of Mr. White. A Mr. White who isn’t a selfish asshole.”

Hayasaka: “I’m not sure about that… I feel like a lot of things I’ve done are selfish, h-haha…”

Jesse: “But are you ‘make everyone build a boat for only you and your junkie partner to escape on’ selfish or ‘care about your life like a normal human being’ selfish?”

Hayasaka: “...”

“You’ve let so many people die. That’s not very fair. They had lives too, you know. Do you like that? Do you like seeing people die? Are they not important? Are you going to let more die? You can say you were just trying to save yourself, but that just makes you selfish. That just makes you weak.”

Hayasaka: “ *A-Ah –*!”

???: “There you are, Jesse! What the hell?”

Both Hayasaka and Jesse turned to the doorway to see a familiar pink-haired girl.

Jesse: “Hey, Nat.”

Natsuki: “Don’t *hey* me. I was knocking on your damn door for so long waiting for a response! I even came late ‘cuz I thought you were gonna take a while to get ready.”

Jesse: “Oh… Sorry ‘bout that.”

Jesse rubbed the back of his neck. Natsuki sighed at his sheepish response, walking over to him.

Natsuki: “No, I’m just… glad you’re out. I didn’t know how you were gonna be this morning after Bojack…”

Jesse: “Nah, I’m good. Or, well, I’m gonna tell myself that. I’m gonna stick to his promise, even when I don’t wanna.”

Natsuki: “Hmph. Good.”

Natsuki smiled at him as Jesse patted her shoulder. Hayasaka couldn’t help but feel an ease overcome him at the sight.

Afterwards, the three left the kitchen. The rest of the group was now all gathered in the restaurant, and Hayasaka glanced around at everyone.

Latte: “Ah, Jesse…! Good morning, dear. I hope you’re doing just a little better than before.”

Jesse: “Don’t worry about me. I gotta be stronger about all this shit. Gotta prove myself a man n’ all that.”

Kurumada: “It’s man enough to shed some tears. No judgements here.”

Hayasaka: (“Despite what happened, everyone feels… less shaken. I don’t think it’s desensitisation. No, perhaps… a strong resolve. After all, that’s what everyone agreed to at the end of the trial. I can’t forget that…”)

???: “Eight prey down, eight prey to go! How will they suffer? It’s anyone’s go! Gyahahaha!!”

Hayasaka turned to see Monotora stride through the restaurant doors, singing a sickly, robotic tune to themselves.

Monotora: “Eight prey down, down in the ground! My next meal is soon, and I’m sure they’ll be found~!”

L: “They’re repeating themselves again… Why are they so eager for eight participants? Perhaps it is the threshold for something?”

Brian: “What do you mean?”

L: “If you think about it, if a perfect killing were to occur in every case, hence resulting in exactly one victim and one culprit, then there would be four cases in total in order to round the participants down to eight.”

Hayasaka: “Yet… Weren’t there three deaths in the third case, and only one in the fourth?”

L: “It all still adds up in the end, does it not?”

Monotora: “Eh? Nah, nah, nah! There’s nothin’ special about eight people, or animals, or livin’ creatures! It’s just the halfway point! A sign things are goin’ great for me, and for Nesos. You’re all halfway there to a sixteen-grave cemetery!”

Saiki: “ *Will a murder even happen at this point? You’re just acting cocky now* .”

Latte: “Saiki’s right. We all know each other much more than we did before, and we’ve agreed to never let such a thing happen ever again…!”

Monotora: “Are you sure? Are you really, *really* sure? I’ve heard even the best of friends can snap in the most dire of situations. At the end of the day, you’re all nothing but weak, weak creatures. Ain’t ya?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, yeah. We’ve heard it all before, you bastard.”

Monotora turned towards Kurumada and stuck their tongue out. Before Kurumada could react on his anger, they sprung up.

Monotora: "Hey now! I s'pose there is one excitin' piece'a news to come after four trials. Ready for it? Congratulations! You unlocked the last island on Island Nesos! Give yourselves a big pat on the back for somehow livin' long enough to see it all!"

Hayasaka: ("The last island…?")

Monotora: "'Course, this doesn't mean the killings won't stop. They'll just keep on comin', and comin'! It's in your nature – don't ya feel it? Kehehehe!"

Trotting out, Monotora left the group in silence, curiosity, and slight frustration.

Kurumada: "Actin' like a damn cat… Thinks they're so funny…"

Hayasaka gave a sympathetic look towards Kurumada's mumbling.

Jesse: "Hey, I'm down to go. What do we have to lose now? And, I mean, the last island's gotta have some good clues. That's, like, basic expectations."

L: "I can't say I've never been more intrigued than I am at this moment. And here I assumed the database was truly the height of my excitement…"

Natsuki: "I don't even know why you're 'excited' in the first place."

Kurumada: "Hey, just be glad he doesn't show it."

Saiki: " *Now that would be the true horror of this death game* ."

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka. Want to walk there together?”

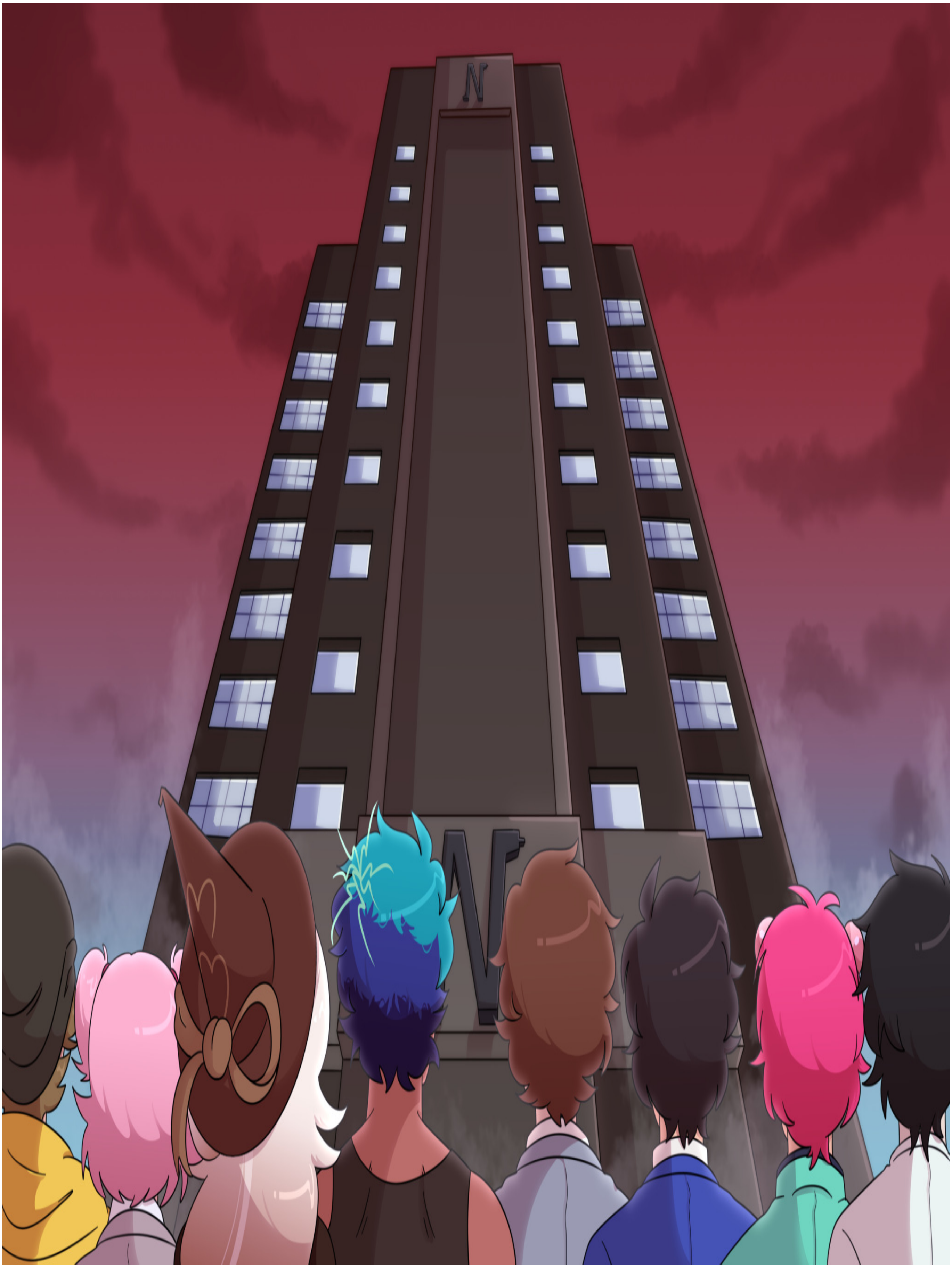
Hayasaka: “Ah, sure. It’s going to be a long walk anyway, isn’t it?”

A long walk was a blindly hopeful understatement. Hayasaka wished he was back in bed, with or without Kurumada, because trekking the spans of three whole islands paired with the bridges that seemed to stretch out for god knows how long had become his new internal conflict. Or, perhaps he was just getting older, because it seemed like everyone else was doing alright.

Hayasaka: (“Maybe I should get back into my habit of jogging. It feels like my stamina is slowly draining away without it…”)

Pushing aside his nit-picky woes for now, he lifted his head up to get a look at the new oncoming island to see if he could pick out any facilities from where he was. However, it felt barren, and he could just see one building shrouded in mist and blur.

As they arrived on the island, he realised that was the *only* building on the island. And it was large. And it was towering. Looming over the eight as if they were nothing but ants in awe below.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Hayasaka: ("This building takes up most of the island's space. I can only see the shore surrounding it. This island… It feels much, much different than any of the others. It feels… dark. *Horrifying* .")

Jesse: "...At least there's less ground to cover."

Brian: "Horizontally, t-that is."

Latte: "Oh my… What could this building be?"

Hayasaka caught sight of Saiki pointing up towards the building. Following his finger, he saw a large symbol in the form of the letter *N* .

L: "...I suppose that stands for Nesos. Unless anyone has any better ideas."

Kurumada: "I'd be actually surprised if it wasn't."

Hayasaka: "Ah, I recognise that logo. It was on the letter I received from them."

Natsuki: "Oh yeah. I remember that logo, too. Jeeze, is this their headquarters or something?"

L: "It appears so. Isn't it interesting they've allowed us to walk right into the lion's den?"

Latte: "Well let's hope we don't get bit!"

Saiki: " *I can't tell if this is a joke about Monotora or not* ."

Brian: "Aren't they technically a tiger?"

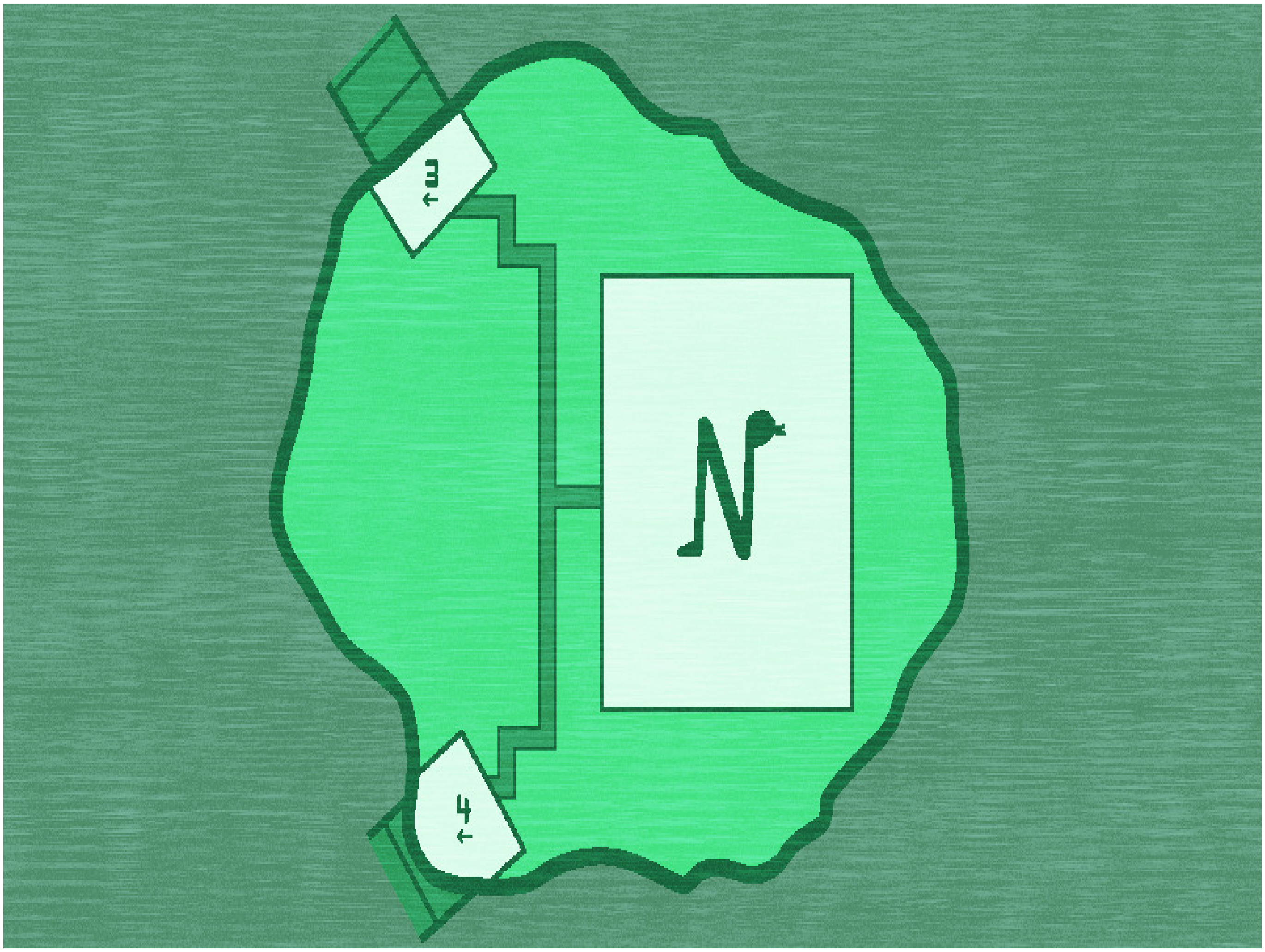
Kurumada: “Who cares? It’s Nesos’ mistake for lettin’ us in now, eh? C’mon!”

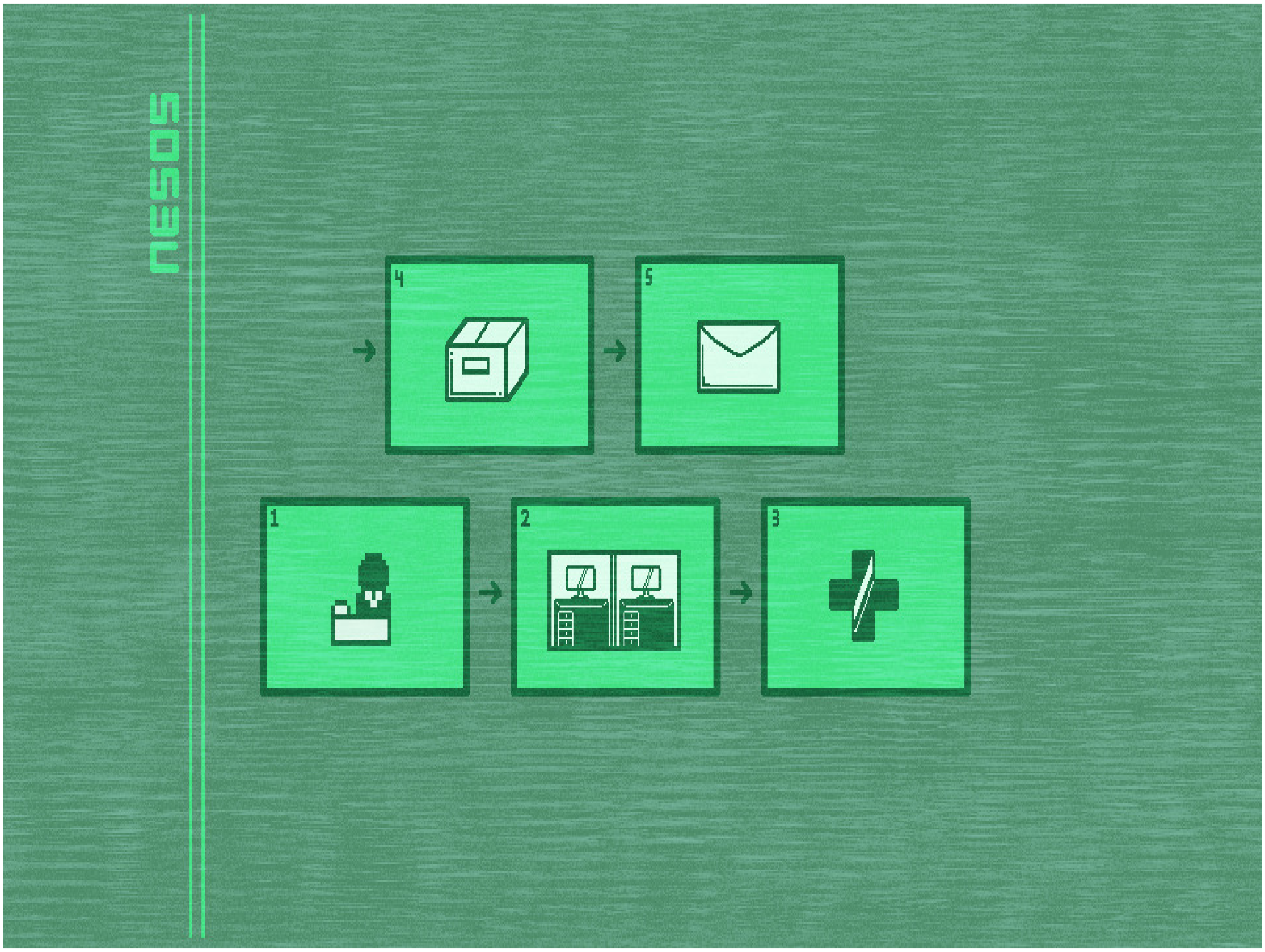
Jesse: “Yeah! Let’s trash the place!”

L: “Let’s not cause a ruckus just yet. We should familiarise ourselves with this place as much as we can.”

Albeit hesitant, the group ventured inside. The ground floor was a simple lobby layout, with nothing special of note. Apart from the expensive sofas and front desk, of course. Halting somewhere in the centre, Hayasaka slipped out his tablet to take a look at the map.

Hayasaka: (“I wonder how many floors there are… Huh?”)





Hayasaka: “There’s… only five floors?”

Jesse: “Damn. This place really is smaller on the inside, huh?”

L: “Not quite. According to this floor post here, there’s ten floors in total.”

Natsuki: “Does that mean we’re not allowed on the top five floors?”

Kurumada: “Damnit, and here I thought we could’a just charged upstairs to the bastards behind this.”

L: “Never so easy, is it? We’ll just have to search the floors we have access to for now.”

At L’s words, the group decided to split off into separate pairs, or alone, up to the floors above.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…”

Kurumada: “I think I know where this is goin’.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, quite obvious now, is it? Haha…”

Kurumada: “We’ve been at it together the last four times, what’s one more gotta hurt?”

Kurumada then scanned his eyes around the lobby, before crossing his arms.

Kurumada: “Still, doesn’t look like there’s gonna be anything helpful to us down here. Just a regular office lobby. Kinda like yours, eh?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose mine doesn’t look as dear as this one, but… This whole building appears to be where Nesos takes care of all internal information and data, going off the vibe alone.”

Kurumada: “I see. Then, I’m countin’ on ya to figure things out from here, huh? Heheh.”

Hayasaka: “Haha…”

The two then turned to move up a floor, but were mildly taken aback by the options available.

Hayasaka: “There’s only stairs…? No elevator?”

Kurumada: “Weird design choice, considering the ten floors, but whatever.”

Hayasaka: “But you make a good point. Why would the hotel, with only two floors, have an elevator over this building?”

Kurumada: “Hey, I can’t complain. Stairs help to stretch ya legs n’ all that. I usually take the stairs when I go to the sports centre in the mornings, anyway.”

Hayasaka: “You know… I wonder why I don’t do the same. Taking the elevator down one floor like that every day… Hah, no wonder I feel so lazy.”

Kurumada: “Hahaha! Don’t beat yourself up about it. If it ain’t in ya typical lifestyle, you’re not gonna think twice about it. Doesn’t hurt to make a change now, though, eh?”

Hayasaka: (“Getting health advice from Kurumada before it’s even struck noon…”)

Reaching the second floor, Hayasaka was no stranger to the rows of office cubicles stretching far down the large halls. If anything, it was the most familiar sight he had seen on this island thus far, which was a little sad to admit.

Kurumada: “Wow, y’know, I was just joking earlier, but now I really think this is gonna be up to your expertise.”

Hayasaka shook his head endearingly at the other’s comment. Down the hall they went, and everything felt the same. Every desk, computer, divider – it was all a carbon copy of the adjacent. Nothing fell out of place, nothing diverted from the pattern. It was almost liminal, nightmarish. Hayasaka didn’t think he’d be able to work somewhere so bland, but then again, just about anyone would assume this was his best fit. Even he himself would agree.

Hayasaka: (“I might really be that depressing, huh? At least I know there’s someone who likes my normalcy.”)

Closeby, someone was coming up on their left, fiddling with a computer without much luck. He adjusted his glasses, letting out a tired sigh.

Hayasaka: “Everything alright, Brian?”

Brian: “Oh, hey! Um, not really. This place is pretty weird, but I thought it’d be easy to find at least something here. Turns out all the computers and filing cabinets are locked. So much for finding any information here.”

Hayasaka: “I have to agree on the strange-factor. For such a big office space, I’m concerned about how there’s no workers around.”

Brian: “Do you think, well… they were… y-you know…?”

Kurumada: “ *Killed* ?”

Brian: “Yeah. Uh, that.”

Kurumada: “Hell if I know. If they have, then who the hell’s been working behind the scenes this whole time?”

Brian: “I guess you have a point. Sorry for the morbid thought. The office space just kinda reminds me of Sintracorp, really.”

Hayasaka: “You’re not the only one. I wished I had stayed back in my old office to avoid all of this, h-haha…”

Kurumada: “Then we should move on before you start gettin’ bad thoughts.”

Brian: “Don’t worry. I’ll keep looking around here, just in case I manage to find something.”

Hayasaka: (“Perhaps I should come back here one day to do some digging by myself, too. I really should know a couple of hiding spots employees like to use…”)

After exchanging goodbyes with Brian, the two walked up to the next floor. The main area on this floor was an infirmary. A typical get-up with beds, divider curtains, and medicine cabinets, and it was mostly clean as far as Hayasaka could see. That was, apart from one bed that appeared used: its sheets slightly creased and pillow a little deflated.

Hayasaka: ("Hang on, why does it look like someone has been here before? Ah, wait…")

FLASHBACK

Bojack: "Eh. Maybe I'm just that good at playing dead. I don't care. All I know is that I guess I got wrong how much alcohol I needed to *actually* die."

Hayasaka: "I… I suppose that meant Nesos found that out too?"

Bojack: "They must have, or else I wouldn't have woken up in a dark infirmary room with this shoddy bandage around my head. Oh, and be forced to watch the last half of this trial go down."

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("I see. This must've been where Bojack was hospitalised during the trial.")

Kurumada: "Why'd an office building need a place like this, then?"

Hayasaka: "I'm not sure. Although, comparing it to the medical facilities we've had access to thus far, the pharmacy by itself can only do so much."

Kurumada: "Guess a pharmacy doesn't house hospice beds, eh?"

Latte: "What're you two whispering about over here? Hehe."

Kurumada: “Eh? Nothing! We’re just talkin’ about this place.”

Latte: “Then don’t put on such a frown. It had me worried for a moment.”

Kurumada: “Oh, uh, sorry…”

Hayasaka: (“Surprisingly, Kurumada and Latte seem to get along well. I believe they must look out for each other after Mai… Ah…”)

Latte: “Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Um, s-sorry. Have you found anything here, Latte?”

Latte: “Apart from a few beds, blood packs and medical equipment, I can’t see any clues. It’s not often a place like this deems itself suspicious, does it?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I suppose it was to be expected.”

Latte: “Look on the brightside. It’s a nice thing to be given, right? Even though it would be best if none of us here had to use it.”

Hayasaka: (“Considering what happened to Jesse and Bojack only a few nights ago, I couldn’t agree more. But, it’s hard to think that way, especially with how hostile Monotora has recently become.”)

With that, they gave their parting goodbyes to Latte as the two ventured higher into the building. A particular room beckoned their sights, and they entered to view rows of shelves full of all sorts of boxes piled high with all sorts of items, objects and pieces. With such a random assortment of things, Hayasaka was more than certain it was a storage room.

Caught up in glancing into each and every box they passed, Hayasaka almost bumped into Jesse and Natsuki, the former of which was rummaging his hands around a non-specific box.

Kurumada: “Fishin’ for drugs in there?”

Jesse: “Ha-ha, very funny, jerkward. What even gave you that idea?”

Kurumada: “I dunno, from the co-dependency on that lighter to your smokin’, I just figured.”

Jesse: “Oh yeah? Well I didn’t figure when you came up to me that night askin’ for a ci–”

Kurumada: “Hey-hey-hey! No need to get off topic now, yeah?!”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Natsuki: “Whoa, hello? I wasn’t expecting to hear that, haha.”

Kurumada: “Ya heard nothin’! Damnit. Just tell us what you’re really doin’ then.”

Jesse: “Haha, fine, I’ll lay off. I’m just lookin’ for clues.”

Hayasaka: (“I’ll just ignore what was implied for now.”) “Anything worth noting?”

Natsuki: “It’s pretty much all miscellaneous so far. We’ve come across stuff like tools, and pieces for extra furniture. With this kinda stuff, I wonder… Would it be possible to build another boat?”

Natsuki then faltered on her words, glancing over at Jesse.

Natsuki: “N-Nevermind… Sorry.”

Jesse: “Hey, we could. Or… we could find some fireworks and set this whole ass building up into flames.”

Natsuki: “W-What?! We can’t do that!”

Jesse: “Hahaha, it was just a joke. Man, you should’a seen your face just then– *ow* !”

Jesse rubbed his arm where Natsuki had lightly punched him.

Natsuki: “Serves you right, idiot.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s like I’m watching a pair of siblings tease each other. It’s rather endearing, haha.”)

Kurumada: “Hey, well, let us know if you do find anything that’ll burn this place down. I’d be happy to help ya out.”

Hayasaka: “I-I’m not sure if I’d be very prepared to partake in arson myself…”

Natsuki: “It’s not for everyone, clearly.”

Regardless of the odd conversation, the two pairs parted ways as Hayasaka and Kurumada left for the next, and currently last, floor. The main room of interest greeted them with the faint scent of vanilla, ergo from all the paper lying around. Shelves were full of pigeon holes, addresses scribbled on with flicky handwriting which couldn’t be read from afar. Small carts were stationed around, full of envelopes, newspapers and magazines.

Hayasaka: “A mailroom…”

Kurumada: “Do office buildings have mailrooms?”

Hayasaka: “Mm, usually. But the size depends on the type of business they practise, and how much mail they deal with, I suppose.”

Kurumada: “I don’t see nobody writing to these bastards, that’s for sure…”

It didn’t take long for Hayasaka to notice an unlikely duo searching around the room. Well, searching would be accurate to describe one, while the other was more content just following the former around.

Hayasaka: (“I would think Saiki looking around with L was a one in a million chance. Perhaps he’s just stopped finding reasons to stay stubborn.”)

L: “Hayasaka, Kurumada. Fascinating room, isn’t it? I believe this is exactly where Nesos wrote and sent out those letters to convince everyone to go to their interview.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I had a bit of a feeling myself…”

L: “Of course, it’s not just a one-way system. Arrivals of the letters written for the first motive must’ve been handled here as well.”

Kurumada: “Kinda old-fashion this way though, ain’t it? Letters aren’t really the future of technology they seem to be pushin’.”

Saiki: “ *If they sent an email instead, half of you would just ignore it as spam* .”

L: “I agree. Not to mention, emails are much easier to track than a letter.”

Hayasaka: “Have you found any copies of those letters then? We did propose to try and find out the contents of them all a while ago.”

L: “We haven’t come across any paper-based copies thus far. However, I’m sure digital ones have been stored on a computer somewhere. If we could crack into it, we could potentially gain access to everyone’s letters.”

Hayasaka nodded, allowing the other to get back to his search. What he didn’t expect was Saiki to be staring at him still. He couldn’t read his expression at all, but the more he looked, the more he was sure there was a sense of hesitancy in the other’s eyes.

Hayasaka: (“Saiki…”)

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “...Um, can I ask you something now then, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *What is it?* ”

Hayasaka: “What… What did *you* do just now?”

Saiki: “ *I’ll tell you later. When I get the courage to* .”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“It’s clear there’s something important he wants to tell me. I wonder when that time will come. It’s not like I have the urge to budge. Although, I really can’t deny my curiosity.”)

Kurumada: “Found anything else, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? Ah, not really…”

Kurumada: “I just went to check the stairs, and yeah, they’re just completely blocked off. No way of seein’ what’s any higher.”

Hayasaka: (“I wonder if there’s more rooms up there like the ones we’ve seen so far…”)

Kurumada: “Nothin’ else we can do now. Should we head back to the restaurant?”

Hayasaka: “The restaurant…” (“Three islands away…”)

L: “The restaurant is a little far. It would be useless to trek all the way back just to have our quick discussion. I propose we round everyone up back down in the lobby.”

Hayasaka: (“What a life-saver…”)

Gathering up the others, they climbed down the stairs back to the lobby. Some people opted to take a seat on the sofas, while others chose to remain standing.

L: “This is no-doubt the most important place on this island we’ve come across. With the way this building has been set up, there appears to be one major place of interest on each floor.”

Jesse: “Got a lotta junk on the fourth floor. Could be helpful, if any of you wanted to build an extra bed, heheh.”

Latte: “There’s plenty of beds on the third floor’s infirmary, otherwise.”

Saiki: “ *I think I’ll just stick to the one back at the hotel* .”

Natsuki: “How about info? Did we learn anything new?”

Brian: “Not yet. They’ve really locked everything up that might be worth something to us.”

Kurumada: “I’m gettin’ real close to just bustin’ something open at this point.”

Brian: “I-I hope the computers aren’t included in that…”

Hayasaka: “At least the mail room might prove the most promising, right? Haha…”

L: “I believe every little part counts. This has to be Nesos’ only headquarters. Evidence of all internal work must be here somewhere.”

Latte: “That does make me wonder… How long *has* Nesos been planning this death game for?”

Natsuki: “And if this is really their headquarters, then why haven’t we found any workers? It just feels like we’re the only ones here… apart from Monotora, I guess.”

Hayasaka: “Perhaps… They might be higher up in the building, on the floors we can’t access yet.”

Kurumada: “Just outta reach, eh?”

Jesse: “Wait, I just thought of something. So, this is Nesos HQ, like you said, yeah? Then, doesn’t that mean whoever’s the head of this whole thing’s gotta be in here somewhere?”

L: “I had the same suspicion. Since the top five floors have been restricted, I’m inclined to believe the organisers are somewhere on those floors right at this very moment.”

Brian: “Oh god… Is the person who really put us in this death game really just above us? T-That’s… That’s just fine… Y-Yeah…”

Kurumada: “Calm down, will ya? I’ll kick their damn asses for all they’ve done when I catch ‘em walking about.”

L: “I’m sure you were simply joking, but I’m certain they won’t show themselves so casually.”

Latte: “They might be trapped up there for a while then, huh? What should we do now, in that case?”

L: “I have a feeling I’ll have come up with something soon, especially since I’m rather interested in the ventilation system.”

Natsuki: “Ventilation system?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, I hadn’t even noticed the vents here…”

Kurumada: “So what? You like the air conditioning or something?”

L: “I’ll explain my intentions later. For now, I advise you all to continue on as normal for now to not raise Nesos’ suspicion on us.”

Saiki: “‘ *Normal’ might be a challenge for some people.* ”

The discussion soon came to a close. Before he could do anything, Hayasaka was brisky pulled aside by Kurumada.

Kurumada: “In that case, you up for a normal hangout ‘as we are’? Heheh.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Of course. Did you have a place in mind to go?”

Kurumada: “Feels like I’m the one always pickin’ the location. Why don’t you choose?”

Hayasaka: “Hm…”

While he pondered, Hayasaka felt someone walk up beside him, tilting his head with a smile.

Brian: “Oh, are you deciding where to hang out for the day? Can I come along?”

Kurumada: “Eh? This isn’t just a… Gh. Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Well… It should be alright if Brian tags along, right?”

Brian: “How about we go to the beach? I haven’t really experienced a proper time there, well, except when I was helping out with the boat, a-and investigating Walter’s murder…”

Hayasaka felt Kurumada lean close to his ear.

Kurumada: “ *I guess Monotora won’t spoil shit if it doesn’t look like ‘date’* .”

He then leaned back up.

Kurumada: “Beach sounds fine to me.”

Hayasaka: “Mhm.”

Brian: “Great! Hey, L, Saiki!”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

Brian: “Do you two want to come to the beach with us?”

Kurumada: “Eh??”

L: “I was never one to fancy the beach. I hope you don’t mind my decline.”

Saiki simply gave a nod.

Latte: “Ooh, are you guys having a beach day? Mind if I join?”

Kurumada: “Eh???”

Hayasaka: “I-I don’t see why not…”

Kurumada: “ *Sigh* . Looks like everyone’s gonna come to the damn beach then if they want.”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada…”)

Jesse: “Actually, count me n’ Nat out. We already got plans. Two words: video games n’ manga.”

Natsuki: “That’s four words, Jesse…”

Jesse: “Same difference.”

Natsuki: “It’s really not.”

Jesse tussled Natsuki’s hair in response, making her giggle.

Hayasaka: ("I'm happy to see them support each other. I'd never thought they would get so close, honestly. At the start, Jesse had Walter, and Natsuki had Yuri. You wouldn't think their paths would cross otherwise.")

Hayasaka and Kurumada, alongside Brian, Saiki and Latte, then left for the beach. It was a bit of a pain having to finally walk all the way back to the first island, but Hayasaka supposed it was going to happen eventually. Regardless, one look out into the gentle waves dancing onto the shore really did put all complaints at ease. As Hayasaka basked in the warm rays of the sun stroking his cheeks, he noticed Brian awkwardly glance around.

Brian: "So… The beach. What do, um, what do people usually do at the beach again?"

Saiki: " *Did you really just ask that right now* ?"

Kurumada: "They get in the water, didn't ya know?"

Brian: "Oh, but we didn't bring any swimsuits out with us."

Kurumada: "Don't matter. You should get in the water anyway."

Brian: "Huh?"

Hayasaka: " *Kurumada* ."

Kurumada: "Okay, fine. Wasn't that funny, anyway. Still, it's not like we can't go in the water, just ankle deep."

Latte: "Hm, I'd rather not get all that wet myself…"

Hayasaka: "Oh, that's right. You said your skin isn't compatible with water."

Latte: “Not to worry! I don’t mind watching you guys if you’d like to go have a dip.”

Latte gave a smile as she sat down on a nearby deckchair. The others slipped off their shoes and socks, rolled up the bottom of their trousers and set foot into the shallow banks of the sea. The water was cool, tickling Hayasaka’s ankles as it brushed past on its journey to the shore. He couldn’t help but close his eyes, breathing in deeply to appreciate the feeling.

Hayasaka: “Ah… How refreshing…”

Brian: “It’s really calming watching the tide come in and out, isn’t it?”

Kurumada: “C’mon, you’re all just gonna stand around the whole time?”

Hayasaka jumped back in reflex as a small wave of water splashed towards him. He heard Kurumada snicker, the perpetrator of the act. Slightly peeved at his peace ruined, but ultimately overtaken by exhilaration, he threw his hand into the water, sending a wave back towards the other. It only fueled Kurumada’s competitiveness, sending the two into a water fight. It wasn’t long until Brian decided to join in too, and they could even hear Latte chuckling along with them from the shore. Saiki, on the other hand, shuffled away, in the hopes to avoid getting even the slightest bit splashed on.

A few rounds of splashing later, and the three found fatigue creeping up on them, much to Saiki’s relief. Strolling back to the sand to dry off, they all sat around Latte. Peering up at her, however, Hayasaka found her expression distant.

Hayasaka: “Latte, is everything alright?”

Brian: “Oh gosh, you didn’t feel left out, did you?”

Latte: “Oh, no! It’s not that, dear. It’s just… Hum. Would you get a bit mad at me if I said I was keeping a small secret from you all for a while?”

Kurumada: “Depends. What’s this secret?”

Latte clasped her hands, before taking a short breath. Then, she reached up for her hat, taking it off and flipping it around so they could see the inside. But, it wasn't empty. Far from it.

An oh-so familiar moon blinked back at them.

Brian: "Huh? M-Moony?"

Hayasaka: "You found her…?"

Latte: "Yes, a little while ago. I came across her floating alone on the third island while I was strolling around."

Moony: "What the? What's with the audience of gawking dudes? You said you were gonna take me to Ena, cookie lady. I've been looking for them everywhere. I even checked the trees just in case they decided to go 'camping' again. Ugh."

Brian: "Huh? But Ena…"

Latte: "..."

Hayasaka: ("Ah, Latte didn't have the heart to tell Moony what really happened. Would I even be strong enough to tell her if I was the one to find her?")

Latte: "...I'm sorry, Moony. Ena's dead."

Moony: "Pfft, good one. Ena can't die. That's impossible."

Hayasaka: "...I'm sorry."

Moony: “Hey… C’mon, why’re you all apologising? This isn’t… ya know… how it’s… meant to… h-happen…”

Moony then grew silent. Eyebrow furrowing, she looked down.

Moony: “How did… Ena die?”

Saiki: “ *Yuri poisoned them* .”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Brian: “What’re you talking about, Saiki? It was–... Um…”

Hayasaka: (“...I see. What Saiki’s trying to do. If we tell her the truth – that Natsuki was their killer – we’d have to explain how Yuri manipulated her into poisoning Ena. Would we be able to get through to her the complexion?”)

Moony: “Damnit, Ena…! You damn idiot! Why’d you have to go and die the one time I decide to stay in bed…?! You’re definitely having the biggest party in the afterlife right now, and you weren’t even invited to it yet!!”

Latte: “Ah, come now, dear. It’ll be okay. Ena would want you to stay strong.”

Moony: “ *Sniff…* Well, I do have some killer muscles in some other form. Still, what am I supposed to do without Ena? They were the only one I could talk to about the other uglies.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s it…?”)

Latte: “We’re all going to escape together, that’s what! And you’re coming with us! So, stick with us, how about it?”

Moony: “This place is kinda crappy now, anyway. And, I have to admit your hat is a pretty solid gig. Your casa is me casa.”

Hayasaka: (“Latte’s words of hope are rather inspiring, aren’t they? Not just here, but her words really have gotten much stronger after having time to grieve for Mai. And, Mai would love to see such energy, haha…”)

Brian: “I hope you don’t mind me asking, Moony, but I was just wondering something. Were you just on the third island this whole time?”

Moony: “Man, you should’ve seen me. I was going everywhere! I even went to the fourth island! Yeah, I bet you weren’t expecting a fourth one. Spoilers!”

Saiki: “ *We’ve already been to the fourth island. And the fifth* .”

Moony: “Aw, come on! And here I thought I had the edge. Wait, did you say fifth? I wasn’t allowed on the fifth island. Every time I tried to sneak onto it, that tig-o kept fending me off, spouting that ‘it wasn’t time yet’. What a loser.”

Hayasaka: “They most likely didn’t want anyone on the next island without another murder at the time…”

Moony: “Hey, speaking of that robo-freak, they’re so weird, right? They’re always just sitting there by the factory at night. They kinda looked like a sad doll some kid dropped.”

Kurumada: “The factory? I thought Monotora was s’posed to be patrollin’ all the islands at night.”

Moony: “I kept coming back to see them sitting there each night. I thought it was pretty funny at first, but then it just got depressing. Is there nothing else interesting to look at for seven hours straight?”

Latte: “Perhaps we were safer than we thought going out during the nighttime hours, huh?”

Saiki: “ *It’s not like this changes much. Most people didn’t care about going out at night after the first trial anyway* .”

Moony: “Ugh, but it’s much nicer being outside, eh? Like, jeeze lady, it’s so hot under your hat! I didn’t sign up for a sauna, ya know?”

Latte: “Whoops! I didn’t think it was that bad. You should’ve said something.”

Kurumada: “Hey, that reminds me. There’s no way you guys ain’t sweatin’ buckets wearing those blazers all the time. Why don’t ya take ‘em off for once?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Ah, n-no, I’m alright, really…”

Kurumada: “No one’s gonna judge ya, haha.”

Hayasaka: “T-That wasn’t what I meant…”

Latte: “But you’re really saying you’re not hot wearing it?”

Brian: “Well, I guess it does get a bit overwhelming sometimes…”

Hayasaka: “...Haah. Alright. What about you, Saiki?”

But Saiki had already slipped off his blazer when Hayasaka turned to look at him. Shaking his head, he removed his own, the heat-encapsulating prison no longer weighing down his arms and torso.

From that, nothing more was said. The group (with their unlikely plus-one) basked in the early evening glow of the setting sun across the horizon. Turning his head slightly, Hayasaka caught sight of Saiki staring at him once more. His lip thinned, that curious feeling arising in his chest.

???: (“ *Come to Saiki’s room when nighttime begins.* ”)

Hayasaka faltered.

Hayasaka: (“H… *Huh* …? What… What was that…? I heard a voice in my head just now. Surely, n-no, am I just imagining things? Is it just a coincidence what it said?”)

He glanced down at the sand.

Hayasaka: (“Maybe… Maybe I should try knocking on his door later.”)

When it had become dark enough for everyone to call it a night, they split off for the hotel. Hayasaka waited a few minutes after the nighttime announcement played before treading with uneasy steps towards Saiki’s hotel room. He raised a fist to knock on the door, before promptly pausing.

Hayasaka: (“This is… Ah, I still don’t know why I’m following the random orders of a voice in my head. Maybe it was just a passing thought? And, if it was, I’ll just tell Saiki I wanted to check up on him. A poor excuse, but that’s all I can really think of…”)

Swallowing whatever was in his dry throat, he knocked on the door. A few beats passed, before Saiki opened the door.

Hayasaka: “H-Hello, Saiki. Um…”

Rubbing his arm, Hayasaka wondered if this was all a big regret on his part. But, Saiki’s eyes grew content at his arrival. He stepped aside, as if gesturing the other to come inside. Confused, Hayasaka followed him into his room.

It was the fifth room he had been in now, including his own. And, yet again, nothing had really changed. Or, maybe he kept finding himself in rooms with owners that really didn't care for decor. Especially not Saiki's: his room looked the most identical to his own with hardly anything out of place or added to the scenery. Apart from the coffee jelly cups on the table, that was.

Now wasn't the time to be taking in new sights, however. Hayasaka turned back to Saiki. He was waiting patiently, as if he was anticipating Hayasaka to begin the conversation to be sure of his full attention.

Hayasaka: "Ah, so… Is this what I believe it is? Are you… going to tell me that thing now?"

Saiki nodded.

Hayasaka rested his hands together as he waited for Saiki to gather his thoughts. Saiki took a deep breath, clenching his fist tightly before looking Hayasaka dead in the eye.

Saiki: " *I have psychic powers* ."

Hayasaka could only look at him as if he had said something idiotic.

Hayasaka: "Ah… W-What? Is this… a joke? To ease the mood?"

Saiki shook his head.

Hayasaka: "No…? But, psychic powers, you said? That's not… A thing. That's not a thing people have. So, you must be joking. It's not like you can just–"

Saiki huffed before leaning down to place one hand underneath his bed frame. Hayasaka tilted his head, unsure what he was trying to prove with the act.

Then Saiki lifted it up with only that hand.

Hayasaka felt his world crumble slightly.

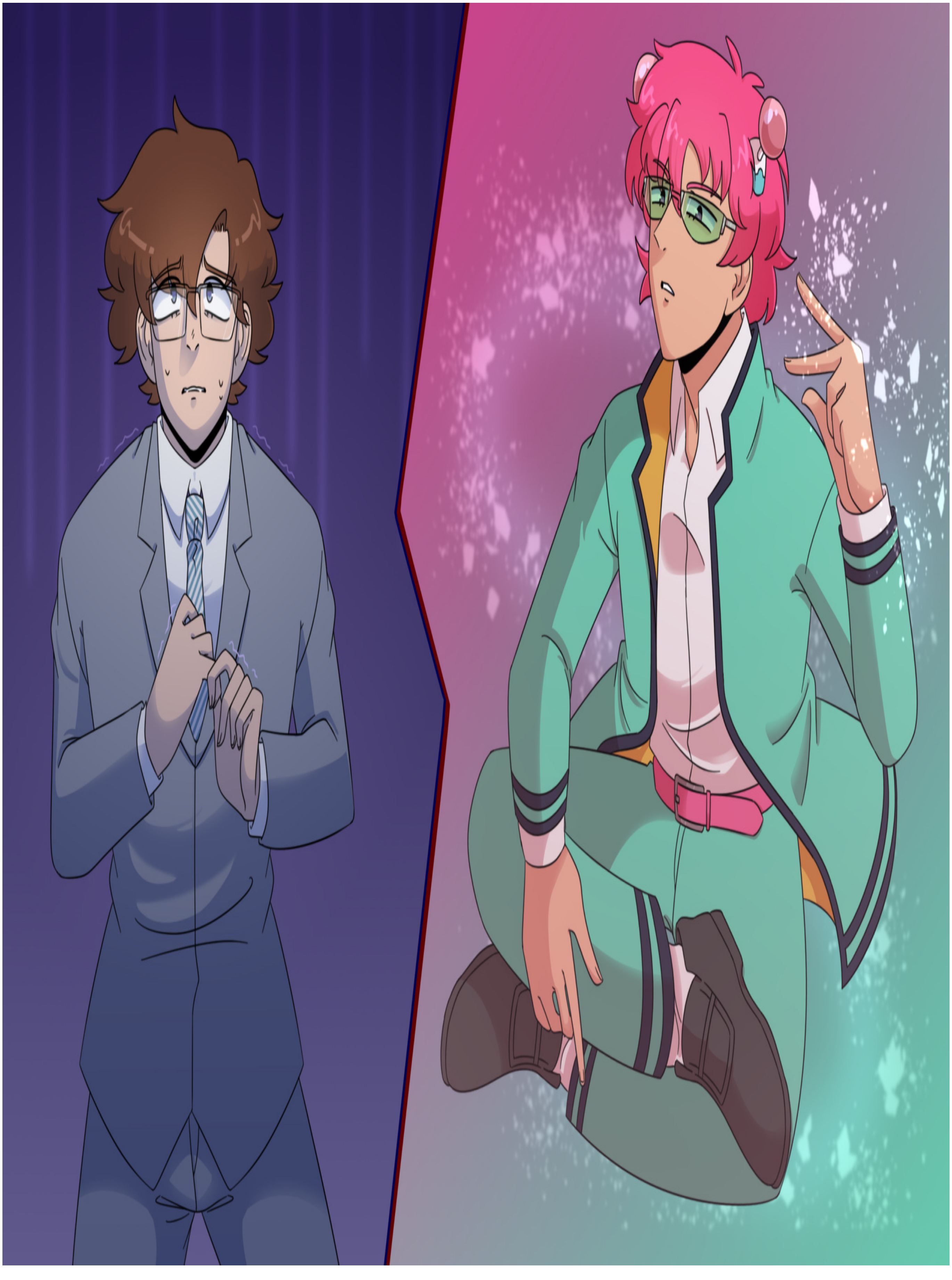
Hayasaka: “Yes, t-that’s… Normal. The beds… they must be quite light, in fact.”

Saiki rolled his eyes, dropping the bed back down. Holding his palm out, a flame roared up from seemingly nowhere. The heat bounced off Hayasaka’s cold face.

Hayasaka: “Ah… A magic trick, is it? You’re just… hiding a match really well, aren’t you?”

Saiki: “ *Good grief* .”

Killing the flame, Saiki leaped up. Hayasaka thought he was just jumping. But he remained in the air, with his legs crossed.



If Hayasaka could explain that, he'd be the best damn theorist on the planet.

But he couldn't.

Hayasaka: "W-What… is going on…? Saiki, is this… is this real? Are you really…? This is… the truth…?"

Hayasaka's body shook so hard he saw the room shift and blur in and out of view. The reality of the situation – was this even reality? – came crashing down on him like a ton of weights crushing his limbs to the floor. In fact, he had begun to stumble back, sure he was going to hit the floor soon.

Instead, he fell back into a chair. A chair that had been slid behind him by seemingly nothing. Or, maybe it had something to do with Saiki's hand in a particular position that screamed 'I did that, thank you very much'.

Saiki: " *I had a feeling you were going to freak out. Just don't scream, or shout, or make a loud noise, okay?* "

Hayasaka lifted his head up, letting out a hoarse chuckle.

Hayasaka: "I don't even think I *can* scream at this point. I'm just… so stunned."

Then, it was silent. Hayasaka assumed Saiki was giving him time to get his bearings back. He felt bad, knowing it was going to take more than a moment to do so. However, looking at Saiki now, something felt off. His brow was furrowed, his nose was scrunched up, he was clenching both fists hard, very hard. It was like he was trying to hold back something.

Like he was trying to hold back *pain* .

Although concerned, Hayasaka let it go for now. There were many more questions swarming his mind, itching to be answered.

Hayasaka: “Why…? Why me, Saiki? Why did you tell me such a thing out of all people…?”

Saiki: “ *I guess… I thought you’d take the news the best out of everyone. I trust you the most not to tell anyone else, either.* ”

Hayasaka nodded.

Hayasaka: (“If that’s how he expected I’d react, then what did he think anyone else was going to do…?”) “So then, why *have* you kept your powers a secret this whole time?”

Saiki: “ *No one on Earth knows of my powers, apart from my immediate family.* ”

Hayasaka: “Does that mean… not even Kaidou…?”

Saiki nodded.

Saiki: “ *Not even my friends knew . And it’s all for one reason. Attention. The more who know, the more unwanted attention it would bring me. The media, scientists, even everyone at school would just crowd around me all day to bug me to do a trick.* ”

Hayasaka: “It… does sound like an unfortunate life. Then, what sorts of powers do you have?”

Saiki: “ *Too many to explain in one sitting. The one I use the most is telepathy. It’s what I use to communicate with others.* ”

Hayasaka: (“Communicate with others…? Is *that* why I never see his mouth open when he talks?”) “...So, that means you have used your powers on the island then, right?”

Saiki: “ *Only a few. When I told you all to go to the beach in the first case, I had used my clairvoyance to see that no one had checked there yet. I did the same thing for the clocktower before Ena’s body was discovered.* ”

Hayasaka: ("Then, was that why he stopped me from going inside the clocktower…?")

Saiki: " *I also used my invisibility when you caught me in the hall after the second trial. And… I used telekinesis a few nights ago to save you from hurting yourself.* "

Hayasaka: "Ah… I see. That's what happened then."

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "...But, I have one last question. Saiki, if you have all these amazing powers at your disposal, why haven't you used them to help us escape the island?"

At that, Saiki didn't reply immediately. Instead, his eyes trailed down towards the floor.

Saiki: " *There's one thing about my powers. Here, on this island, someone has limited them.* "

Hayasaka: "Limited? What do you mean…?"

Saiki: " *Back at home, I can usually use all my powers freely. But, ever since I woke up here, most of my powers have been disabled, and the ones I can still use have been severely limited, and I don't understand why. For example, I'm supposed to always be able to read people's thoughts. But here, I can't seem to hear a thing* ."

Hayasaka: "I suppose if you could, you could've identified the culprit in each case by their thoughts alone…"

Saiki: " *I've managed to figure out what I can and can't use, and to what degree. But it's been hell doing it* ."

Hayasaka: "Why's that?"

Saiki: " *Anytime I try to use my powers, a surge of pain runs through my body* ."

Hayasaka: "P-Pain…?"

Saiki: " *The more stronger I attempt a certain power, the more pain I experience. I only went invisible that night you caught me on impulse, but I suffered a painful night in my room afterwards because of it* ."

Hayasaka: "God… That must've been horrible…" ("So, that's why he looked so in pain before. And, it does explain why Saiki didn't attempt to save Kaidou during his execution. Could he have tolerated such pain that early on? The mix of the pain and shock must've been too much to do anything. I really can't blame him. After all, I was the exact same during Mai's execution, wasn't I?")

Saiki: " *...I've been hesitant to ask for help, as it would require me to out my powers to everyone. It's not something I can do so easily on my own* ."

Hayasaka: "Do you think Nesos were the ones to limit your powers, Saiki?"

Saiki: " *I've had that suspicion the entire time. But now, I don't want to let them get away with hurting us any longer. I want to stop being complicit to what they did. I want to use my powers to defeat them* ."

Hayasaka: "Saiki… That's extremely selfless of you. However, would that be okay? What about your pain tolerance? Is it enough to withstand?"

Saiki: " *I have to face the reality that I'll never live the normal life I've desired as long as I have these powers. I accept what I need to do, despite the hardships* ."

Hayasaka: "Saiki… The fact that you showed off all those powers just to convince me, despite knowing of the pain it would cause, is… You've really been struggling to reach out all this time, haven't you? Especially after Kaidou… Ah. Hey, d-don't worry, alright? You don't have to tell the others about this if you don't feel comfortable yet. You'll have plenty of time to work through your worries, since chances of a murder are very low as of now."

Saiki: " *You mean no longer a possibility* ."

Hayasaka: "Ah… r-right. My apologies."

Saiki nodded, and despite his neutral expression, Hayasaka could make out the slightest smile reaching out behind his eyes.

Saiki: " *Thank you, though. And, again, for not overreacting to the news. I guessed you wouldn't though, because I like how normal you are.* "

Hayasaka: ("For some reason… I really don't mind him calling me that. It's almost endearing how much Saiki likes my 'normalness'.")

Saiki: "*... I won't keep you any longer. You can leave now if you want.* "

Hayasaka: "I-Is that so? I would, however… My legs feel too weak to get up, h-haha…"

Letting out a soft sigh, Saiki stepped towards Hayasaka, wrapping his hand around his arm. And just like that, Hayasaka was back in his own room, faster than he could blink. He felt another wave of uneasiness wash over him, but he held it back for Saiki's sake.

Hayasaka: "W-What about the chair…?"

Saiki: " *Just keep it for now* ."

Hayasaka nodded awkwardly, before noticing how Saiki had gripped his arm in an attempt to soothe himself.

Hayasaka: “Saiki–”

Saiki: “ *I’m trying to build up a tolerance to mild pains. I chose to use my powers here to help you.* ”

Hayasaka lowered his eyes as he smiled.

Hayasaka: “Ah, I see. Thank you, Saiki. Please, rest well.”

Saiki nodded one last time as he disappeared, presumably teleporting back to his own room. Now alone, Hayasaka attempted to stand up, only to fall onto his bed rather pathetically. Yet, he opted to remain in his new-found position, unsure if any of his limbs would be able to pull him into anything more tolerable. His whole body felt heavy, still coming to terms with what he witnessed that night.

Hayasaka: (“Regardless, I’ve been given quite a big responsibility to keep Saiki’s secret safe. I want to work hard for him. After all, he can do much more wondrous things than I can.”)

Removing his glasses to the best of his current ability, Hayasaka attempted to close his eyes to try to get some sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

???#1: “I should do a checkup on the robots, maybe a bite force test again with Monotora? Hmm…”

???#3: “Boss, it hasn’t been responsive to any of our commands as of late. Is there a reason why it’s acting like this?”

???#2: “I don’t see the issues you’re bringing up right now.”

???#1: “Huh…? What’re they talking about…?”

???#3: “Haven’t you noticed? Monotora has been acting out of hostility, quite frankly I’ve never seen them be this aggressive before.”

???#2: “Oh that? It’s always been aggressive, it’s what they’re programmed to be. If anything, this is a sign of progress. Besides that, I’ve been personally doing some training with them myself, special training I’ll say. They will respond to commands soon, you’ll see.”

???#1: “Training? What the hell do they mean by that…?”

???#3: “And I suppose you know the location of the other one? We’ve done a search around the enclosure and concluded that it's not inside besides Monotora.”

???#2: “Who cares what happened to that one? I wouldn’t be surprised if it wound up between that beast’s jaws sooner than expected.”

???#3: “That extra piece cost us a big fraction of our budget! How could you be so lenient with its disappearance? It sounds like you’re alright with money being poured down the drain!”

???#2: “So what? It was a failed experiment. Trust me, I’ve seen it countless times. Don’t wanna get caught up in sunk cost fallacy, do we? If anything, I’m much closer to taming that freak.”

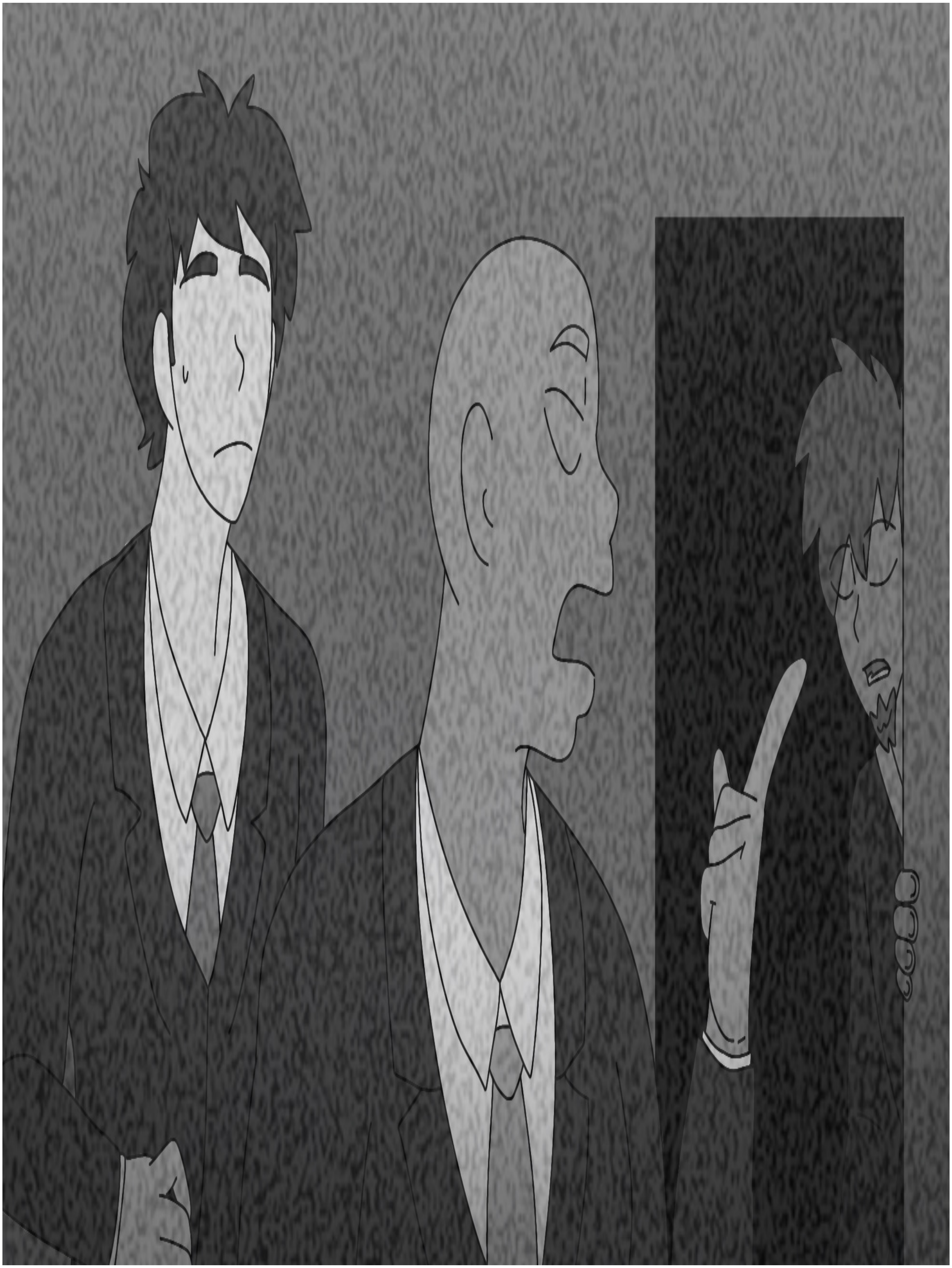
???#1: “...”

???#2: “Keep monitoring the thing, I want to make sure it reaches its full potential for when I can finally start to use them for what I’ve intended them to do.”

???#3: “Yes, boss.”

???#2: “Oh, and keep an extra eye on the engineer, make sure he doesn’t interrupt the progress that’s already been made. I will not wait any longer for this to be completed.”

???#1: “Me…? The boss wants me to stay away from Monotora…? That can’t be right, they must’ve done something without informing any of us… I need to find out and see what they’ve done.”



DING DONG, BING BONG

Hayasaka: ("Ugh… Why do I feel so sore?")

Peering down at himself, Hayasaka realised he had still been assuming that same awkward position from last night. Letting out an exasperated sigh, he stretched out his aching limbs and managed to pick himself up off the bed. He ignored the thoughts that badgered at his mind as he went to get himself ready, no matter how hard they poked and prodded him to invite them in.

Stepping into the kitchen, it was almost deja-vu who he saw inside.

Natsuki: "Don't add too much extract! You're only supposed to put a little in."

Jesse: "Why not? Don't you want this to taste really vanilla-like?"

Natsuki: "That's not how that works, dummy…!"

FLOUR
SUGAR

One counter had been completely vandalised by flour grains, egg shells and drops of milk. Bowls, spoons, whisks: the whole nine-yards of baking equipment. Natsuki huffed as she grabbed a sieve.

Natsuki: “Here, do you wanna do this part instead?”

Jesse: “You’re not gonna get mad at me anymore?”

Natsuki: “I wasn’t–! I wasn’t *mad* , okay? I’m just…”

Jesse: “...Nervous? Hey, don’t get too worked up about this. If anything goes to shit, just blame it on me.”

Natsuki: “That would just make me feel bad…”

Jesse: “Hahaha. Hey, watch this.”

Natsuki: “ *Eh* ? That measurement was almost perfect! Where’d you learn to do something like that just by eyeballing it?”

Jesse: “Let’s just say I’m not the worst cook in the world. I know my way around a recipe.”

Hayasaka hadn’t realised he was smiling until he stopped focusing on the two. Quietly, he snuck over towards the coffee machine in the hopes he wouldn’t distract them. To his misfortune, the loud drizzle of the machine caught the two’s attention, and he turned to them sheepishly. Natsuki instinctively tried to hide what was on the counter with her back.

Natsuki: “H-Huh…?!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to disturb you two.”

Jesse: “No worries, yo. I was just complainin’ about how we all haven’t shared a breakfast in a long time, and Nat suggested we bake muffins for everyone.”

Natsuki: “It’s just… I haven’t touched an oven for a while, either. Not since my murder plan with Yuri…”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki has come a long way to be comfortable to bake again, hasn’t she?”) “I see. That’s very nice of you. If you need any help, I wouldn’t mind giving a hand, haha.”

Natsuki: “I think we can handle it. Thanks, though.”

Picking up his coffee mug, Hayasaka went to leave. He had only taken a few steps, however, before he recalled something from yesterday.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Natsuki…?”

Natsuki: “Yeah?”

Hayasaka: “Do you know… Um, has Latte come and told you anything yet?”

Natsuki: “...Yeah. I know about Moony, if that’s what you’re trying to ask. I saw Latte with her a little earlier.”

Hayasaka: “I see.”

Natsuki: “...H-Hey. Um, does Moony know? Does she know what I did… t-to Ena…?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, actually… It was sort of twisted into pinning the blame on Yuri.”

Jesse: “Huh. Well, that ain’t such a bad thing, right?”

Natsuki: “No… I don’t feel like that’s right.”

Jesse: “Then, why don’t you find the time to go tell her the truth?”

Natsuki: “I… I dunno. It’s just…”

Natsuki grabbed a clump of her skirt between her fingers, glancing down.

Hayasaka: “...I’m sorry. I’ve really ruined the mood with this, haven’t I?”

Natsuki: “N-No! It’s fine, really. It’s not like we can really sweep this under the rug. I just… need a bit of time.”

Jesse: “...Hey, Nat. Which oven rack should I put these on?”

Natsuki: “Huh? Wait, the middle one! They’ve gotta be baked even, I told you that!”

As Natsuki scrambled for an oven mitten, Jesse chuckled.

Hayasaka: (“That’s right… As long as we can keep each other’s spirits up despite our problems, things will be a lot easier to face.”)

One light, muffin-filled breakfast later, Hayasaka found himself with some time on his hands. Spending the rest of his coins on the machine, he searched around for someone to chat with.

Hayasaka: (“It’s funny how I really wouldn’t mind speaking to anyone now… There’s a lot of interesting things I’ve learnt so far.”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Jesse at the woodworking shop.

Jesse: “I wonder if there’s any shit from the pharmacy I can mix together…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Jesse.”

Jesse: “Hey, Mr. Hayasaka! Guess you’re here for another chat? Dope.”

Hayasaka spent some time with Jesse. Hoping he’d appreciate the gesture, he gifted him a wooden box.

Jesse: “Holy shit…! This is fuckin’ awesome! I can put a bunch of shit in it, and stare at it all day!”

Hayasaka: “Haha… I’m glad you like it, Jesse.”

Jesse: “So, what’d you wanna talk about this time?”

Hayasaka: (“I’m glad to see he’s fine since our last talk… I’ll make sure to not saying anything stupid this time.”) “I suppose I’d like to know a little about your friends? You mentioned them briefly before.”

Jesse: “Ah, the homies. Well, there’s Badger: a big guy with a big heart. ‘Prolly not so much a big brain though, haha. And then there’s Skinny Pete: he’s a loyal dude… most of the time. But I can’t blame him: it’s tough on the streets, y’know what I’m sayin’?”

Hayasaka: (“Skinny Pete? Badger? I can only assume those are nicknames… But, I’ve should’ve expected it, knowing Jesse’s lingo.”)

Jesse: “And, well… there’s also my girlfriend, Jane. She’s the one I got my letter from in the first motive. She’s this rad-ass tattoo artist, and is all smart n’ shit with art. You ever heard of Georgia O'Keeffe? Well I didn’t until she mentioned her, haha.”

Hayasaka: “That’s nice. I suppose you miss her a lot, a-as well as your friends…”

Jesse: “Yeah, it sucks total balls. But, like, you’re lucky you got some friends with you.”

Hayasaka: “…”

Jesse: “Oh wait. No–No, uh, not in this situation we’re in… Shit. I’m sorry.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, it’s alright. I could tell you meant well.”

Jesse: “Heh, I dunno what I’m even sayin’. I mean, I came here with Mr. White, after all.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, speaking of Walter, what was the business you two made together? Both of you have been… well, rather vague with it so far.”

Jesse: “…I guess we have been keepin’ it a secret, haven’t we? I mean, there’s probably no harm in tellin’ you.”

Hayasaka: (“What does he mean by that…?”)

Jesse: “So, me n’ Mr. White have been cookin’ meth and sellin’ it on the streets. Like, he’s a chemist, and I was already in the business, so like…”

Hayasaka: “I–T-Thats…” (“I’m not sure how I’m supposed to react to that. At all. This just keeps getting more absurd, doesn’t it? Haha…”)

Jesse: “…Guess you think I’m nothin’ but an ‘idiot junkie’ now, huh?”

Hayasaka: “Ah… I don’t think I can. Well, I don’t think I want to, at least. I’ve learned about your situation more personally, so it’s not as if you’re bad or anything. I don’t think I could bring myself to hate you, Jesse.”

Jesse: “S-Shit… really? Goddamn, Mr. Hayasaka, you’re a real one.”

Hayasaka: (“A *real one* ? I can only assume that’s a good thing, haha…”)

Jesse: “When we escape this shitty island, I’m gonna take you to a Denny’s to show you the cuisine of American food. On me.”

Hayasaka: (“I’m a little hesitant to try a ‘Denny’s’, but…”) “Haha, I suppose I wouldn’t mind that?”

Some time later, Hayasaka found himself strolling around the islands, hoping to build up some physique.

Hayasaka: (“Since there’s so much ground to cover on so many islands, I really need to keep myself in good stamina–”)

PING

Hayasaka stopped in his tracks. Realising the muffled noise came from his pocket, he took out his tablet to see he had received a message.

[2:32 PM] L: Good afternoon. I hope you’re all not busy currently. I’d like to request everyone to meet me on the 5th floor mailroom of Nesos HQ. I’ll be waiting.

[2:33 PM] Jesse: u got it boss

[2:33 PM] Natsuki: lol boss

[2:34 PM] Latte: I'm on my way! With Moony too hehe

Hayasaka stared at the responses for a moment. Shrugging, he began typing on the on-screen keyboard.

[2:35 PM] Hayasaka: I'll be there soon, too.

[2:35 PM] Kurumada: me to

[2:35 PM] Kurumada: too

[2:35 PM] Kurumada: fuck

Hayasaka clasped a hand over his mouth as he held back a chuckle.

Hayasaka: ("Ah, why do I have a feeling he scrambled to text when I replied…")

Hayasaka's eyes then scanned L's message once more as his lip thinned.

Hayasaka: ("Still… I wonder why L's called us to meet him in such a place? Perhaps he's found a clue in the mail room?")

Curious, he made his way over to Nesos HQ. Arriving on the fifth floor, he waited for everyone else to arrive.

Kurumada: "Alright, so what's goin' on? Did ya find something?"

L: “Oh, no. I haven’t found anything new. However, I have theorised a potential method in order to *gain* new information.”

Latte: “Really? Do tell us how!”

Brian: “Does it have something to do with the vents? I remember you mentioned them yesterday.”

L: “Indeed. I did a bit of digging, and I’ve found that the ventilation system is interconnected by floor. Each vent connects to the one on the floor above it, and so on.”

Jesse: “Uh, yeah? That’s how vents work, Mr. detective of the century.”

L: “Yes, but what I’m trying to get at is by using the vents as a form of transport, we would be able to gain access to the higher floors.”

Natsuki: “Wait, are you serious? Can we really do that?”

L: “The vents are just big enough for a person to crawl through them, and I propose one of us does just that. They will be relaying information back to the rest of us from here with the use of these walkie-talkies I found in the storage room on the floor below.”

Brian: “Wow, you really had this all thought out! Although, I guess I really shouldn’t be shocked, considering this is coming from you, haha.”

Hayasaka: “But, who should that person be…? This doesn’t seem like an easy feat.”

Jesse: “Hey, why doesn’t Brian do it? He looks thin enough to fit, heheh.”

Brian: “Oh? Uh, sure. I don’t mind.”

Kurumada: “You do realise he was just jokin’, right?”

Brian: “H-He was? Well, s-still, I was probably going to volunteer anyway. I’ve actually had experience crawling through vents back at Sintracorp.”

Hayasaka: “You… You have?”

Saiki: “ *What haven’t you done at that place at this point* ?”

L: “I find it satisfactory. Experience, no matter how small, is good in this situation where we don’t have much of a choice.”

Saiki: “ *Still, won’t he just get caught on the cameras by someone if he goes into the vents* ?”

L: “I was anticipating such a problem. For that, some of us will have to cause a good distraction elsewhere so Nesos will be forced to turn their attention away from the vents.”

Jesse: “Oh, yo! I can do that! I can make a super good distraction!”

Natsuki: “You can? Well, I’m gonna come with you. J-Just in case you end up doing something stupid.”

Latte: “I can join you guys as well! It’s probably best for someone to keep watch, hm?”

With that, the three left to cause their distraction scheme. L then handed Brian a walkie-talkie and a screwdriver.

L: “To make sure, press this button so we can hear you speak.”

Brian: “Ah, okay…”

Kurumada: “Should we give each other code names or somethin’? Like, ‘string bean reportin’, over’.”

Brian: “I-I’d prefer if you left that nickname back in the previous trial…”

Hayasaka: “But, Brian… Are you sure you’re alright doing this? We don’t know what’s up there, and I don’t want you to get yourself in danger…”

Brian: “Don’t worry, I want to do this. If I’m able to find some clues, then I want to do all I can to help everyone. I-I appreciate your concern, though.”

Hayasaka: “I see. Then, good luck.”

Brian smiled at him before walking underneath the room’s vent.

Brian: “Um… How am I supposed to get up there, exactly?”

Kurumada: “Hang on.”

Strolling over, Kurumada picked Brian up by the waist and heaved him up.

Brian: “H-H-Hey…!”

Kurumada: “Bwaha. Get to unscrewin’ already.”

Begrudgingly, Brian unscrewed the vent and climbed inside. Kurumada turned to Hayasaka, giving him a playful look. Hayasaka could only shake his head at the odd interaction.

A few beats passed, before L clicked his walkie-talkie.

L: “Brian, can you hear me?”

Brief silence. Hayasaka stared at the walkie-talkie.

Brian: “...Y-Yeah. It’s a bit dark in here, though.”

Hayasaka: “Are you alright, Brian?”

L: “Where are you right now?”

Brian: “Um, I’m okay! And… I think I see a new room…!”

Kurumada: “Hell, for real?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, so L’s theory was correct then.”)

Brian: “It’s probably the sixth floor, right? Should I try going inside?”

L: “No. Climb as high as you can.”

Kurumada: “Eh? Shouldn’t he be explorin’ every floor? There’s gotta be important info on all of ‘em if they’re all restricted.”

L: “I’m fully aware of that. However, what I really want to find out is where the main organiser of the death game is hiding, or in other words, the mastermind behind this company. Since this building is akin to an office firm, going by typical conventions, the mastermind should have an office on the very top floor.”

Hayasaka: “Are you sure? That doesn’t sound very safe to me to enter a place with such a person.”

Brian: “Don’t worry, Hayasaka! I’ll stay cautious.”

However, after a short while of waiting for a response from Brian, one came, albeit rather frustrated.

Brian: “Huh? What’s going on?”

Hayasaka: “What’s wrong?”

Brian: “I don’t know. I’ve made it to the ninth floor, but the vent path stops here. I can’t go any higher.”

Hayasaka: “Are you sure you’re not just at the top floor now?”

L: “No, a tenth floor does exist. It’s been specifically labelled on the floor plan in the lobby, if you recall.”

Kurumada: “Damnit, looks like the mastermind must’a blocked off their vent. Damn bastard wasn’t takin’ any chances, eh?”

Brian: “Hum… Should I just investigate the ninth floor?”

L: “You might as well.”

Saiki: “ *You just sound dejected now* .”

Clanks of a screwdriver emitted from the radio of the walkie-talkie, followed by a few mutters from Brian as he tore away the vent grille.

Brian: “Hm… How should I get down…? Oh, there’s a chair nearby I could–Ah!”

A small thud could be heard. The others could only stay silent in sympathy.

Brian: “Ugh… *H-Huh* …?!”

Hayasaka: “B-Brian?” (“This doesn’t sound good…”)

L: “What did you find, Brian?”

Brian: “W-Well… It looks like this is meant to be an office room of sorts, but… It’s completely trashed. Not just that… There's *blood* everywhere. And, actually, are those scratch marks on the walls? They’re… pretty deep…”

Kurumada: “Sounds like you walked into a bloodbath.”

L: “Bloodbath…? I suppose that must be Monotora’s room.”

Hayasaka: “Monotora’s room?”

L: “If Monotora is only permitted to roam the islands during the nighttime hours, then where Brian is currently must be where they are kept during the day until they are dispatched for an announcement or trial. But, in that case, why have they been given a whole room to themselves? Surely, couldn’t a cage suffice them–”

Brian: “ *A-Ah* –! Please tell me that isn’t a severed leg! Oh god…”

Kurumada: “Yep. Definitely Monotora’s room.”

Hayasaka: (“Hang on, if that *is* Monotora’s room, then… where exactly is–”)

CRASH

Brian: “Ah! Damnit, I didn’t see that chair there…”

???: “ *Oh* ? Has prey come to me early~?”

Brian: “H-Huh…?!”

Hayasaka: “N-No… T-That can’t be…?!”

L quickly grabbed the walkie-talkie.

L: “ *Brian* . Get out of there, *now* .”

Hayasaka was almost taken off guard at how cold L’s tone had become. He heard frantic footsteps from the other end, followed by metal clunks as he could only assume Brian was climbing back into the vent.

Brian: “Ah! No–! The walkie–...!”

CLANK

???: “Kehehe, what’s this?”

MUNCH–KSSSH

Kurumada: “What the hell just happened?! Don’t tell me that animal bit the fucking walkie-talkie!”

L attempted to click the radio’s button a few times, but it was futile. The other end produced nothing but static. He slammed the walkie-talkie forcefully onto a desk.

L: “We can’t get a hold of Brian anymore.”

Hayasaka: “N-No…! But he’s in danger! M-Monotora is…!”

Kurumada: “Shit…! We can’t talk to him anymore! How the hell are we s’posed to know where he is?!”

Rapid breaths escaped Hayasaka as a hand snaked up to grab at his hair.

Hayasaka: (“What should we do?! Should I try going in the vents myself?! That way, maybe I can save Brian…! Yes, that’s the only way I can–”)

???: (“ *You better not be thinking of doing something dangerous* .”)

Hayasaka faltered. Whipping his head around, he tried to find the source of the voice. That was when he realised it had come from his *head* .

Hayasaka: (“Wait… *Saiki* …?”)

Saiki: (“ *I assume you know it’s me. I’m using forced telepathy to project my thoughts into your head. You’re the only one that can hear me right now. And, no, I can’t read any of your thoughts, either.”*)

Hayasaka: (“Ah… I see…”)

Hayasaka then glanced towards Saiki, a pleading look spread across his face. Saiki’s eyes narrowed in response.

Saiki: (“ *If I can strain myself for long enough, I should be able to project Brian’s thoughts into your mind, and vice versa. It’s another ability of forced telepathy.* ”)

Hayasaka: (“Rather like third-party file share, isn’t it?”)

Saiki: (“ *I’m going to trust you didn’t make a terrible comparison just now* .”)

Hayasaka: (“Is he sure he can’t read my mind…?”)

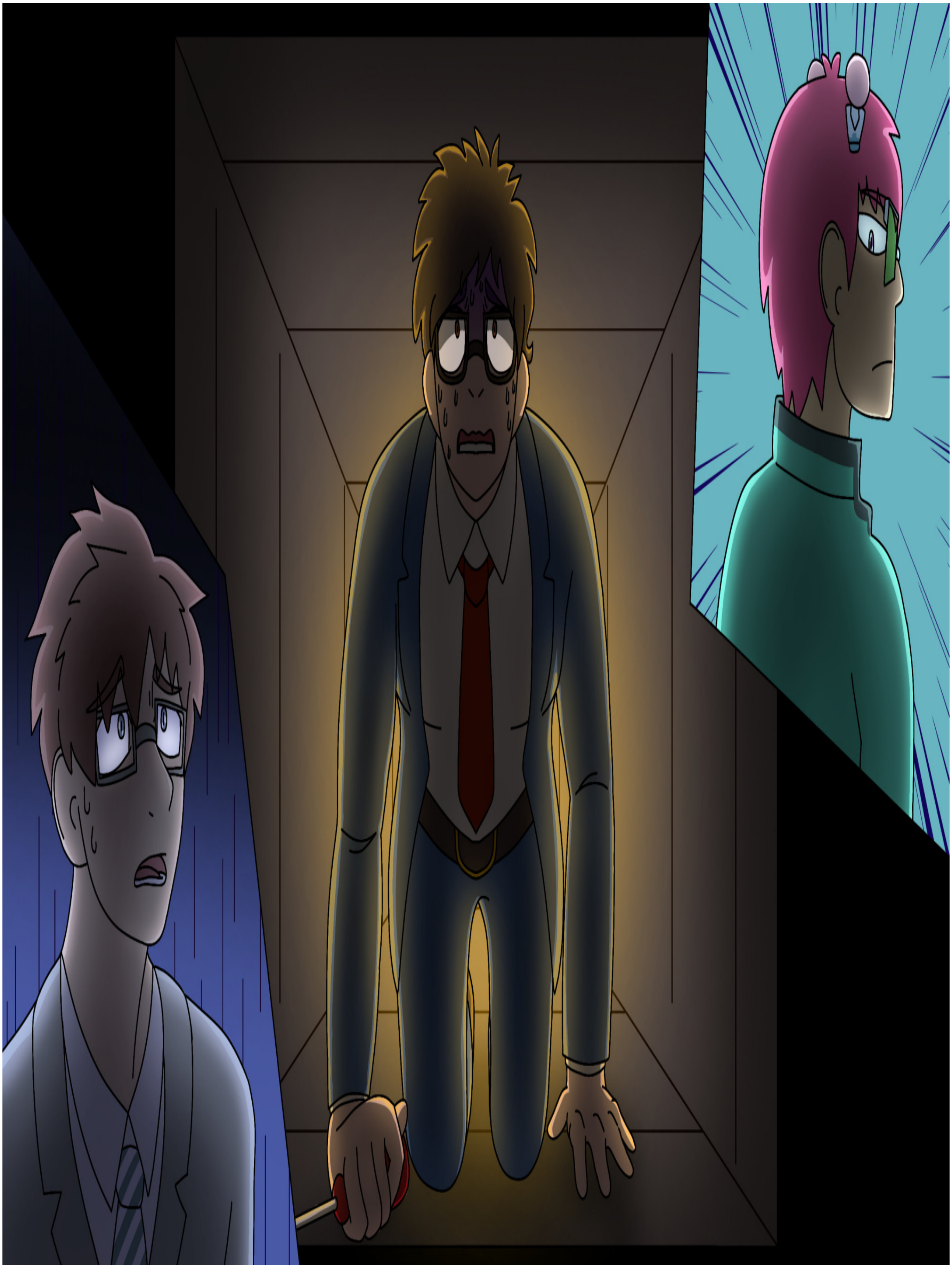
Saiki: (“ *Just don’t let him know this is my doing, alright* ?”)

Hayasaka nodded briefly at Saiki so as to not let anyone catch their attention.

Before he could process it, a swarm of thoughts were thrown into Hayasaka’s mind.

???: (“AaAaH…! Oh god oh god oh god oh god…! I’m going to die…! I’m really going to die this time! No no no no no!”)

Hayasaka: (“Brian…!”)



Brian: ("I'm gonna di– *huh* ? Hayasaka?")

Hayasaka: ("Brian, please! Calm down…! You need to focus!")

Brian: ("Wh…What's going on? Why can I hear Hayasaka in my head? Oh god, I'm really going crazy now, aren't I? Is this a new fear response to death?!")

Hayasaka: ("Ah… Uh… I'm your conscience! That's all, really! Please don't think too hard about it, alright?")

Brian: ("I didn't think my conscience would sound so similar to Hayasaka. Maybe it's a subconscious thing?")

Hayasaka: ("Um… I suppose so? Haha…? Wait–no, it doesn't matter! Brian, where are you right now?")

Brian: ("I think I've managed to get down to the eighth or seventh floor. Although shouldn't you already know this, as my–")

Hayasaka: ("How far away is Monotora from you?")

Brian: ("I heard them crawl into the vents after me, but I don't think they know who exactly they're chasing. And I really don't know if that's a good thing or not…")

Hayasaka: ("Keep moving forward for now. Don't you dare look behind you.")

Brian: ("You don't have to tell me twice.")

A sigh of relief left Hayasaka's lips.

Hayasaka: ("I'm just so glad he's alright for now…")

Brian: ("Huh?")

Hayasaka: ("Uh, nothing…?")

Brian: ("Ah, damnit! Since when was there a two-way here?")

Hayasaka: ("Wait, Brian, what're you talking about?")

Brian: ("Oh, wait, I remember now. There was this two-way path that leads to the fifth floor vents, wasn't there? I just need to go… Uh… Oh god! Which way was it again?!")

Somehow, Hayasaka could hear faint banging from above.

Brian: (" *Oh my god Monotora's getting closer no no no no no*– !")

Hayasaka: ("Brian…!")

Frantically, Hayasaka turned to Saiki.

Hayasaka: " *Left or right…?!* "

Kurumada: "Eh?"

L: "...?"

Saiki put a hand to his temple.

Brian: ("I'm gonna die…! No no no no no–!")

Saiki: (" *Take the left path* .")

Brian: ("Huh? Now my conscience sounds like Saiki–")

Hayasaka: ("Just crawl already…!")

Metal clanks and bumps could be heard approaching the room's vent. A blur of black and blue emerged from the dark corner of the vent as Brian scrambled out. Kurumada was quick to dive over to catch him from hitting the ground, chucking him down as he swiped the screwdriver from his hands and slammed the vent grille back on the opening, screwing it tightly shut.

Kurumada: "Shit…! I swear to god, if that bastard tries breakin' it open…"

Brian: "W-Wait, it's okay! I lost Monotora at the two-way."

Kurumada: "At the what?"

Brian: "N-Nevermind…"

L: "I'm impressed you managed to navigate yourself back here in one piece, Brian."

Brian: "It's all thanks to my Haya-Saiki conscience, really."

Kurumada: "I'm sorry – your *what* ?"

Hayasaka: "H-Haha, you know what, isn't it so good Brian is back safe, though?"

L: “...”

Brian: “Oh… L. I’m sorry for screwing up your experiment. If I hadn’t been so careless, then…”

L: “It’s fine. What you found will be enough to keep me busy for a while.”

Kurumada: “Guess we won’t be able to use the vents again after that, huh? Not with the threat of Monotora crawlin’ around them n’ shit.”

L: “I do admit we won’t be able to conduct something similar for the current period. We should give it a few days to let things die down. For now, we’ll disband for the day. I’ll go and find the others to let them know their distraction scheme is no longer needed.”

Hayasaka: (“As if we should even consider the idea of doing something like that again. It put Brian’s life in danger…”) “I feel like I’ve asked this a lot already, but are you really alright this time, Brian?”

Brian: “Yeah… I think. Well, just a bit shaken, really. It’s actually kind of nice to have someone wanting to check up on me so much.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… I-I just get quite worried, is all.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, so maybe stop tryn’a give him a damn heart attack.”

Brian: “I-It wasn’t my fault…!”

Kurumada chuckled as everyone began to leave the room. Hayasaka looked over at Saiki to give him a word of thanks, but faltered as he saw his fists tightly clenched together and his teeth gritted as if he were trying to break them.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. You comin’?”

Hayasaka: “U-Um, I’ll be with you in a minute. I just want to talk to Saiki about something.”

L: “...”

Hayasaka couldn’t help but notice L raise a brow, but to his relief, he continued to leave with the others. Slowly, he approached Saiki with a soft look.

Hayasaka: “Saiki…”

Saiki averted his gaze. He was still attempting to hold back his pain, despite it being just the two of them.

Hayasaka: “You’re in pain… You’re hurt from all the projections you did, didn’t you?”

Saiki: “ *The clairvoyance too… of seeing which path Brian needed to take* …”

Hayasaka: “Saiki… You need to take some pain relieving medicine. There should be some in the pharmacy. I might be able to recommend a good one…”

Saiki: “ *No. I’ll be fine. I told you, I want to do this. So, I have to endure the pain it brings me* .”

Hayasaka: “That–That doesn’t mean you should have to sit there and take it…!”

There was no response from Saiki. Hayasaka let out a sigh.

Hayasaka: “If you don’t want to do it for yourself, then could you do it for me? I know it’s a selfish request, but…”

Saiki: “ *...Okay.* ”

It wasn’t a lot, but it was something. Hayasaka gave him a smile, and he returned a nod.

Later on when the nighttime announcement rang out, Hayasaka returned to his hotel room.

Hayasaka: (“Things are definitely picking up speed for our investigation. L has become more proactive with things, and while I’d rather not pull such a dangerous stunt again, it really was quite an impressive idea. And Saiki… Without him, would Brian have managed to get himself safely back to us? I’d hate to think about it. It does prove he’s genuine about using his powers to help us, even if I’m the only one who knows about them. It makes me wonder how long he can keep it all a secret…”)

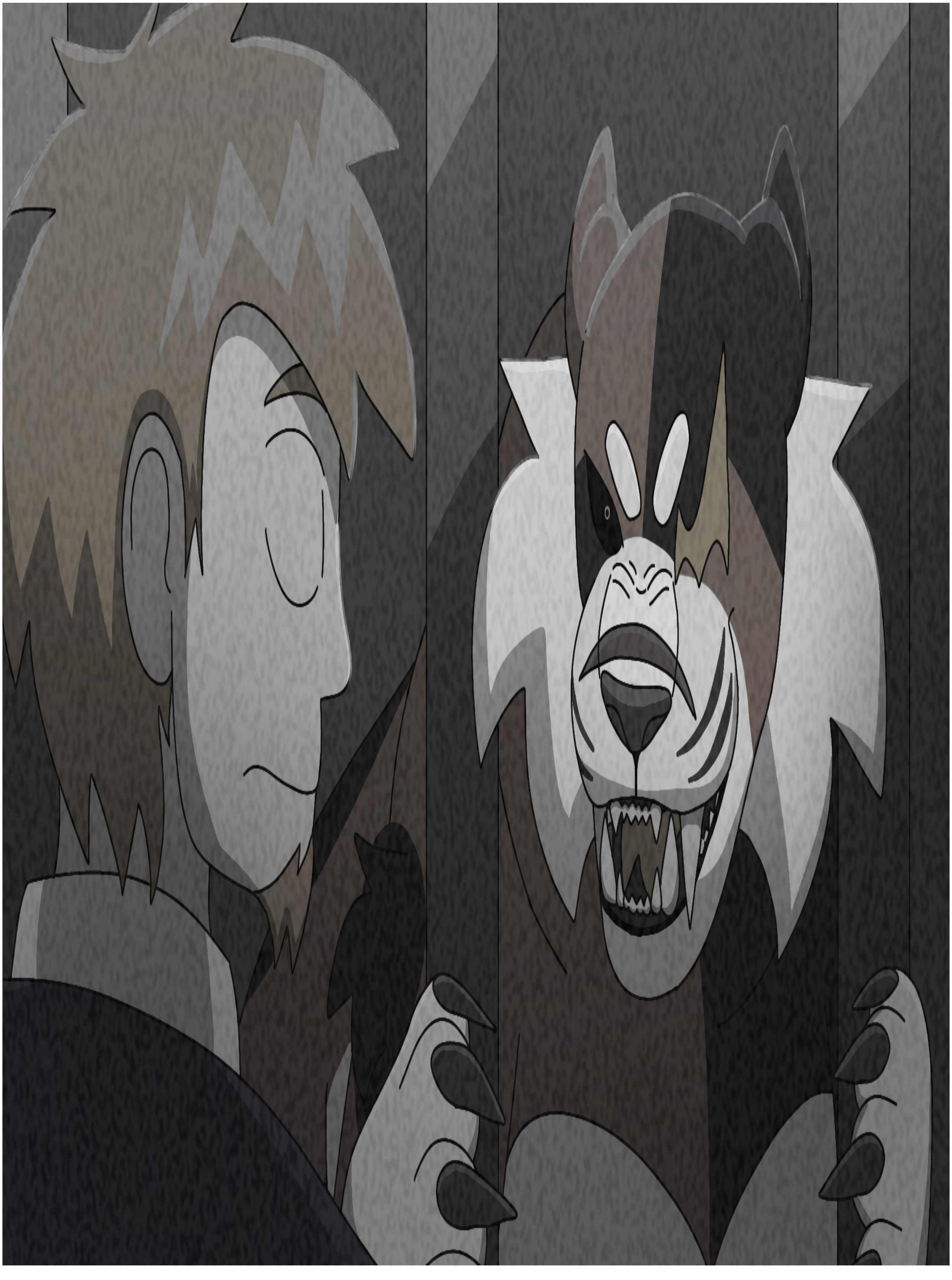
Soon, Hayasaka’s thoughts drifted off as he went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

CREAK

STEP STEP STEP

???#1: “Psst! Over here, Tora!”



Monotora: “You ain’t supposed to be here, past your bedtime too isn’t it?”

???#1: “It should be right for me to be here anytime, considering I’m the one who built you.”

Monotora: “...”

???#1: “Listen, there’s some questions I need to ask you, about what had happened recently.”

Monotora: “...”

???#1: “I noticed you’ve been acting weird recently, you seemed angrier the last time I saw you. Is there a reason why?”

Monotora: “Nothing happened, I’m just hungry or something, I ‘unno.”

???#1: “Then I suppose you should know where Hana went? She’s been missing for the past few days and none of us can find her. We can’t leave her alone in a massive building.”

Monotora: “Why’re you asking me that.”

???#1: “Tora, was the boss involved in her disappearance?”

Monotora: “QUIT ASKING ME THESE STUPID QUESTIONS!”

???#1: “Tora… I’ve seen how you two got along, it almost looked like you were siblings even. I can tell the impact of Hana’s disappearance has been affecting you. Hey, if you and I can work together, we can figure out the truth behind the boss and Nesos itself. These terrible practices… They’re not right. This company isn’t right. And if we can take this entire operation down, I will return the favour as much as I can - including saving Hana.”

Monotora: “...It’s too late.”

???#1: “Why? She’s alive in the building somewhere isn’t she?”

Monotora: “She’s dead.”

???#1: “D-Dead? You mean… she was destroyed? By who?”

Monotora: “...Look, there’s no point doing all that. Nesos has all the control here, you wouldn’t stand a chance against ‘em yourself… I’m useless now, Hana isn’t with me anymore. There’s nothing I want to do now. Leave me alone.”

???#1: “You don’t really think that do you? Is that what Hana would agree with?”

Monotora: “...Well-”

???#2: “Hey! What’s all that commotion inside there! This area is off limits!”

???#1: “Shit–! I need to go!”

Monotora: “...”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Arriving down at the restaurant, Hayasaka paused on his usual path towards the kitchen as he noticed someone sitting at one of the tables on his own. His hands were clasped together on the table, thumbs tapping together haphazardly in an attempt to calm his nerves. Concerned, Hayasaka approached him.

Hayasaka: “Brian…?”

Brian: “O-Oh! Good morning, Hayasaka. Are you going to get a coffee?”

Hayasaka: “Hey, are you… okay?”

Brian: “Um… Y-Yeah. Yeah. I’ve just been… thinking about what happened yesterday. A little.”

Hayasaka: “A little…?”

Brian: “Mm… Maybe a lot. *Sigh* , I keep getting bad thoughts about things ending differently. What if I wasn’t fast enough? What if I took the wrong path? T-Things like that.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Brian… I’m so sorry to hear that. I don’t know what I can say, other than you suffered the best outcome, right? You’re still here, aren’t you?”

Brian: “Y…Yeah. I should probably be more grateful for that…”

Brian smiled, but Hayasaka could tell it was forced.

Brian: “Still, it gave us a clue in the end, didn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “I suppose it did, if it satisfied L, haha. You know, what you did for us was very brave…”

Brian: “Huh? Ah, erm, i-it was nothing, really. It could’ve been anyone in my place… A-And they probably would’ve done a better job…”

Hayasaka: (“Brian…”)

???: “Hey! What’cha four-eyed freaks yappin’ about over here?”

Brian almost jumped out of his chair as the mechanical tiger popped their head up from the opposite side of the table.

Brian: “N-N-Nothing! We weren’t talking about anything…!”

Monotora: “Ya weren’t? Then why did I see your lips movin’? Try’na be one with the fish? Kehehe, you could go lie with them if ya want!”

Kurumada: “Oi, bastard! Get away from them!”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada…!”

Monotora: “Ahahaha! Oh so heroic, ain’t ya? I was just playin’ with some prey. I’m actually here to round you all up to the park for a very special announcement.”

Jesse: “And what if we don’t wanna go?”

Monotora: “Oh, you’ll be there. There's a sense of curiosity in creatures like you lot that grabs hold of your heart and squeezes real tight until ya either satisfy it or let your guts explode from the inside! And, hey, I’d be pretty eager for any outcome then!”

Latte: “‘Creatures like us’ don’t appreciate your terrible examples.”

Natsuki: “Yeesh, coming from the professor of all people…”

Monotora: “Like I give a damn! I think my vernacular is one-of-a-kind, ya feel me? I was exposed to a place of no expectations, no rules, unlike you bastards. I’m free to say what’s on my mind without no filter. I find it so entertainin’ you can’t even handle the most tame of what I can say!”

With that, Monotora pounced off.

Saiki: “ *It’s not that we can’t handle it, it’s just annoying hearing monologues akin to mediocre horror films* .”

Hayasaka: (“Well, mediocre is a stretch depending on what they *do* say…”)

Brian: “Oh god… I-It’s gonna happen, isn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Eh? What’s gonna happen?”

Brian: “I’m gonna get punished for what I did yesterday, aren’t I? A-And, they’re making a big announcement out of it like how they did with Bojack and I’m gonna be–”

L: “Brian, calm down. It’s highly unlikely Nesos has any idea of what occurred yesterday.”

Jesse: “Yeah, ‘cuz my distraction scheme was a total bombass success!”

Hayasaka: “Actually, Jesse, what exactly did you do to get Nesos’ attention?”

Natsuki: “It’s not as impressive as he makes it sound. He made a giant mess of the stage bar, blasting loud music and smashing bottles of alcohol. That place is a total wreck now, so I hope you weren’t ever planning on going back there…”

Jesse: “Hey! It definitely made sure *some* eyes were gonna be on us, yeah? I know you enjoyed it. You got real into it when you put on those songs and started lobbing shit at the stage.”

Natsuki: “I–! W-Well, it was just… I was doing it ‘cuz you were! N-Not that it was any fun or anything…”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Natsuki…”)

Latte: “Hehe, it sure was quite the crazy distraction! Even Moony got herself in on the action.”

Moony: “ *It’s not often I get to cause a riot for free…* ”

They heard Moony mumble from underneath Latte’s hat.

L: “And I had the pleasure of entering such a… wild environment when I went to tell them to stop. Regardless, we should hope it sufficed for now.”

Brian: “ *Sigh* … I guess so.”

With that, the group left the restaurant for the park. There, they saw Monotora sat atop the fountain.

L: “I suppose it’s time for you to announce the next motive.”

Monotora: “No, ya see– *hey* ! That’s my line, you damn freeloader! Now you’ve gone n’ ruined the surprise!”

Kurumada: “Not like it was gonna be a surprise at this point.”

Brian: “Ah, that’s right. I should’ve realised this was gonna be a motive announcement… Haha.”

Hayasaka: (“I keep seeming to feel worse and worse for Brian…”)

Natsuki: “Motive announcement or not, it’s not like we’re ever gonna murder each other now!”

Monotora: “Oh yeah? Comin’ from the one who’s already had the ecstasy of killin’ someone before, I really don’t buy it! You must think it’s so easy to say once you’ve had a piece of the pie.”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “Hey, bitch! Don’t you ever say that to her!”

Monotora: “Jeeze, can it, will ya? I haven’t even gotten to the main part yet. Look, I know you all too well. All you want is to get off this island and return to ya normal lives. Even if you claim ‘I’ll never be the same ever again after what I’ve been through’, if a boat or plane outta here appeared right now, you’d scamper to it like a baby turtle tryn’a get to the ocean before something can snap it up into its jaws.”

Saiki: “ *So what* ?”

Monotora: “ *So* , Nesos has come up with the perfect offer that’ll get those gears turnin’ for some real fun. You’ve all been assigned a target to kill. This target will be one of ya fellow co-workers – simple, right? If you can successfully kill your target, you can leave this island without that thing. What thing? Oh, y’know, an executive trial!”

Kurumada: “What the?! That’s gotta be the most ridiculous motive yet!”

Monotora: “How is that ridiculous? No need to worry about bein’ caught out, or gettin’ dragged to a punishment. Just some quick ol’ bloodshed and you’ll be right on ya way home! Back to your friends and family! And the remaining trauma of the death game!”

Hayasaka: (“A murder *without* a trial…?”)

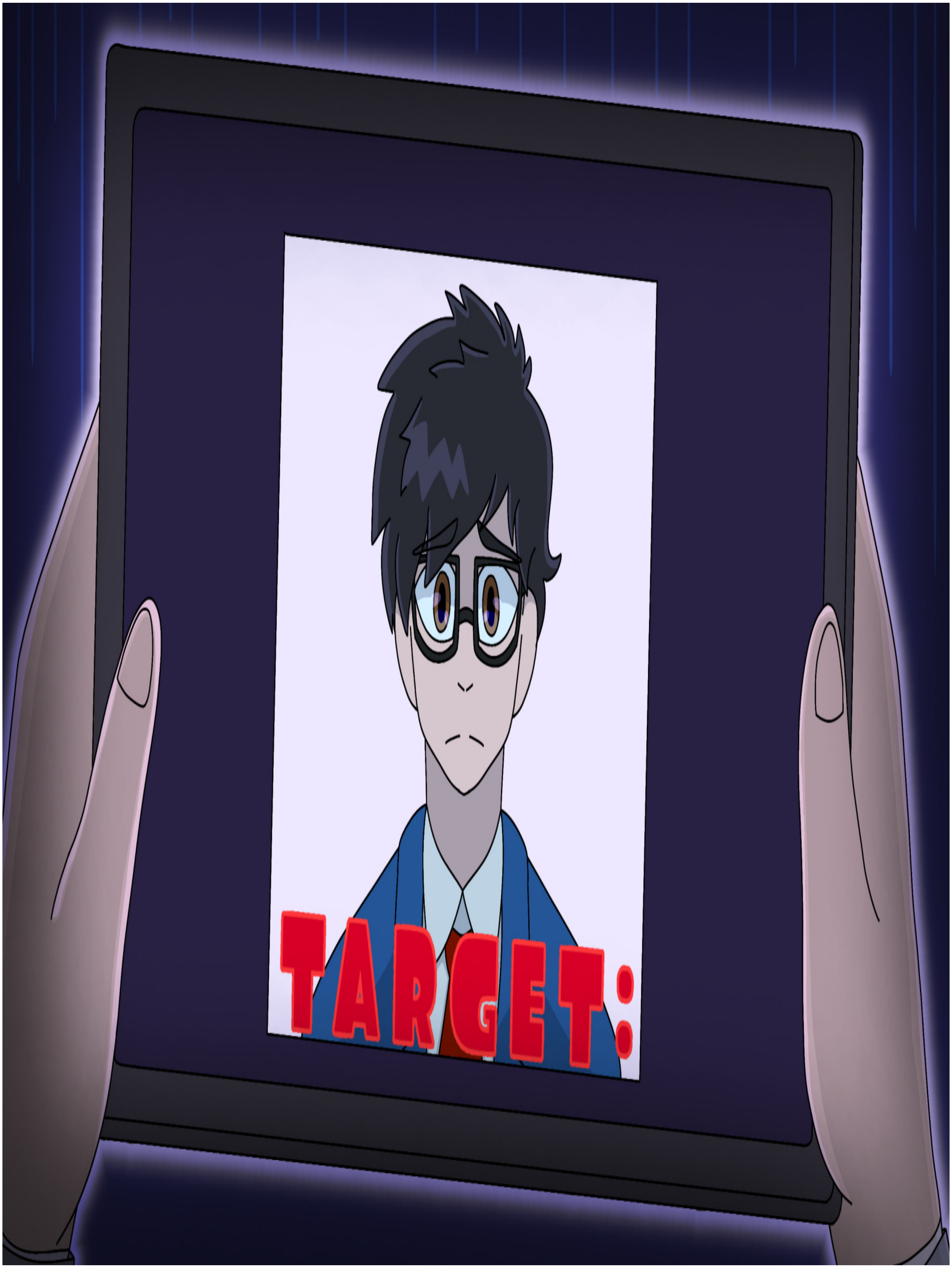
L: “And how will we know who this target is?”

Monotora: “Your individual assigned targets should be uploaded to your tablets in right about…”

PING

Monotora: “Now!”

The group were quick to retrieve their tablets from their pockets, Hayasaka included. A new screen had appeared, displaying an image of someone all too familiar. His glasses reflected back in Hayasaka’s own.


TARGET:

Hayasaka: (“Brian…? I’ve been assigned Brian to… Oh god. What a cruel outcome.”)

Monotora: “Just a lil’ warnin’, though. Don’t go spillin’ who you’ve been assigned to anyone else, alright? Not to ya friends, not to ya target, or else you’ll be gettin’ a visit from me and a pretty little punishment. I mean, it’d be a lot harder for the attacker if their target knows they’re out for them, kehehe! Well then, happy happy killing!”

Trotting off, Monotora laughed to themself until they could no longer be heard by the group. Hayasaka subtly shifted his sight towards Brian.

Hayasaka: (“Even so… Even if I was never going to take up any offer the motive claimed to provide, this just solidifies I’ll never fall for it. After all, Brian… He’s my friend. I wouldn’t even think about such a thing.”)

L: “Despite the act leading to punishment regardless, I agree that no one should share who their target is to anyone, even just by implying it. Trust is more likely to slip if you know who has you rather than not knowing at all.”

Jesse: “Yeah, man. I trust you guys. Whoever’s got me… I don’t even care, man.”

Latte: “It’s not that we shouldn’t care, but we should instead entrust our hopes in them to build up their trust with us. It’ll let us know we have nothing to worry about!”

Saiki: “ *This motive is pretty useless then in that regard.* ”

Hayasaka: (“Yes, it’s… rather strange how quickly we’ve overcome this motive, I have to admit. Ah, no… I know why. It’s because our resolve is a lot stronger than before. We have nothing to fear now, right?”)

Content things were looking for the best, the group split off for the day.

Hayasaka: (“In that case… How about I go find someone to talk to? If I happen to come across the person who has me as their target, I wonder if they’ll act more friendly to show how much this motive won't affect them? Haha.")

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found L in Nesos HQ's mailroom.

L: "I don't fancy changing my clothes so much, but this island's heat has got me searching for alternatives to remain cool…"

Hayasaka: "Hello, L. Would you like to talk some more, perhaps?"

L: "Another chat with you doesn't seem so unpleasant. In that case, let's go to the restaurant for some tea."

Hayasaka spent some time with L. Remembering what he requested of him last time, Hayasaka gifted him a box of panda snacks.

L: "Oh, aren't these a favourite of mine? It's been a while since I've indulged myself in these… This is satisfactory, Hayasaka."

Hayasaka: ("I'm glad to see he likes it, haha…")

L: "Hm, this tea's a bit too hot…"

Hayasaka: "Ah, L, I don't mean to be rude but, why do you sit like that? With your knees up, I mean. I've seen you do it during the morning meetings as well…"

L: "If I don't sit like this, my deduction skills will deplete by 40%."

Hayasaka: ("Then why is he doing it *now* ? As far as I'm concerned, we're just having light conversation…")

L: "...I can tell by your face that you're still curious about the Kira case. Am I correct?"

Hayasaka: "Ah, um, I suppose I am."

L: "While I cannot disclose any further information about the case itself, I could talk about some of my team members."

Hayasaka: "Oh, you have a team? I figured you worked alone as you never mentioned anyone else before, haha…"

L: "Even I need a few helping hands to supply me with new information to analyse. I work with six NPA members, alongside the chief of the team's son, Light Yagami. He's a prodigy of sorts: a rather intelligent individual, almost as good at deducting as myself."

Hayasaka: "Oh wow…" ("If another person as smart as L existed, how would they even get along?")

L: "Another slight aid is Misa Amane. She's… Light's 'girlfriend'."

Hayasaka: "Huh?"

L: "Well, I'm unsure how else to describe her to you. Although, she has helped create some rather convincing ploys with her… charming advertising skills."

Hayasaka: "I see. Do you miss your team, then?"

L: "What a strange question to ask. I could ask you if you missed your coworkers. Would there even be a viable answer?"

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I guess not… I’m sorry, it’s just that you’ve neglected to mention any friends or family so far, so I was unsure if you were missing anyone right now.”

L: “...”

Hayasaka: “L…?”

L: “...Thank you for the tea, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, he left. Oh god, did I upset him with what I said? With his cold persona, there’s no possible way I can tell for sure. It’s best to leave him alone for now…”)

Time passed in the day as Hayasaka found himself approaching Nesos HQ on his own.

Hayasaka: (“Now that I have some time, I’m going to go to the second floor cubicles to see if I can do some digging on my own… Even if I do end up empty handed, it would’ve been better to check than not at all.”)

Inside the lobby, it was colder than usual. Hayasaka assumed it was from the mixture of the vents and the lack of body heat from being on his own. It was quiet, too, he realised. A low hum emitted from the vents, and that was it. Really, it was a little frightening being on his own in the building where the members of the company that tormented him for days on end were somewhere above him. Brushing aside the cold sweat that ran down the back of his neck, he began to climb the stairs.

He had only taken a few steps when *it* began.

???: “ *AaAaAaAaAHHH* –!!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?!”

Just above him, a loud, painful scream rang out. It tightened in his ears, as if crawling into his brain to reach out for salvation. For aid.

For help.

Hayasaka was sprinting up those stairs before he even knew it, throwing himself to the top of the second floor as he tripped and stumbled and dashed towards the sound of the needing voice.

Hayasaka: “Hey…! W-What’s going on?!”

His mind screamed at him for calling out so easily like that, but he pushed it down for now. Rushing past desk after desk, he whipped his head in every which direction to find whatever he was looking for. Whoever he was looking for.

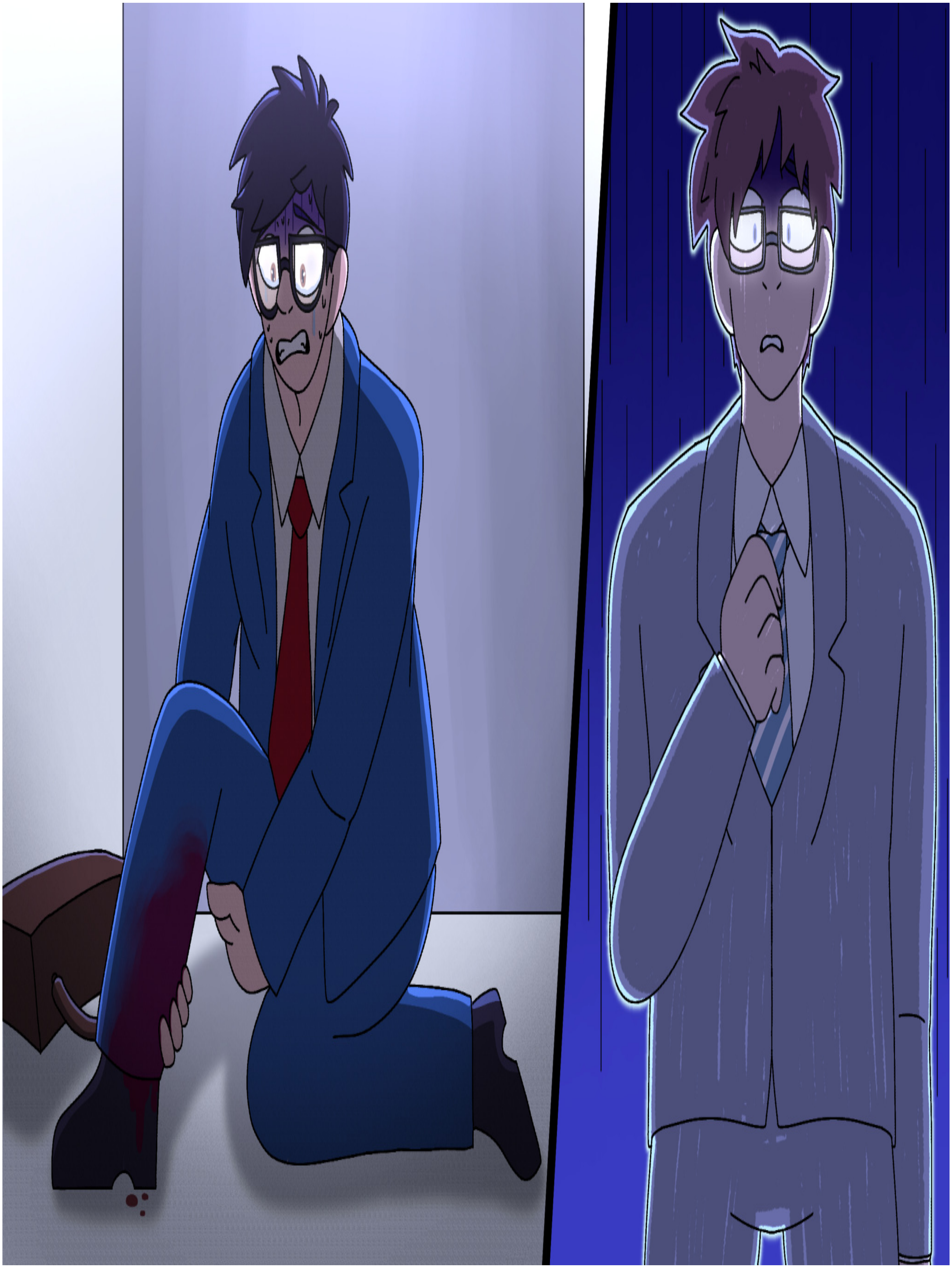
And when he did finally find it, he hit the breaks on his toes so hard he actually almost fell flat onto his face.

Hayasaka could cease to move.

Oh god.

Oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god–

Hayasaka: “Ah… *Ahh* …”



Brian: “ *G-Gh… Khhh… H-H-Hahh…* ”

Trembling. So hard. Gripping so tight onto his leg. His leg was bleeding. So much blood it was so bad.

Hayasaka: “ *Brian…* !!”

Diving down to Brian’s side, Hayasaka placed a hand on his shoulder. His shaking was so violent under his touch.

Hayasaka: “Brian! W-What happened?!”

Brian: “ *T-T-The… I-I don’t know it hurts so much a-ah-ah… I-I was just trying to, nn, look around–ahhh… Cubicles then I… haahh …*”

Hayasaka: “Brian, calm down. J-Just calm down, alright? It’s okay. You can tell me later. You need help. I’ll help you, okay? Let’s get you some help, okay?”

He rubbed soothing circles into the other’s back as another problem came to mind.

Hayasaka: “B-But… How am I supposed to contact the others? I-I don’t know where they are right now…”

Brian: “T-Tablets… Hayasaka, the tab–tablets…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, r-right! Thank you, Brian…!”

Slipping out his tablet, Hayasaka saw how his own hands were shaking now as he typed out a message to the best of his ability.

[4:16PM] Hayasaka: please come to nesos hq brian is badly hurt will be infirmary

He didn't care about grammar mistakes, or punctuation, or whatever replies he would be receiving. Shoving his tablet away, Hayasaka took one of Brian's arms and wrapped it over his shoulders. He then did the opposite, wrapping his arm across Brian's shoulders. Slowly, he heaved the two up from the floor. Brian wobbled, whining in pain as he fell slightly onto Hayasaka's side.

Hayasaka: "I-I'm sorry, Brian. Please, be strong for me so I can get you upstairs."

Brian: "O-Okay…"

Hayasaka had to ignore the other's struggling steps and noises as he helped him up the flight of stairs and towards the infirmary. Thank god it was only one floor above. He then rushed Brian a bit faster than he should've to a bed. Once he was laid down, he started darting around the room in search of bandages, disinfectants, and whatever else would be necessary. The hardest part was keeping his hands still as he got to work wiping away the blood and treating the injury the best he could.

But of course it would be hard. He didn't want to see a friend like Brian hurt so badly. This was the last state he'd want to see him in, let alone be the one to treat him.

That's when he realised something was missing. Brian wasn't being vocal anymore, in fact, he had gone completely quiet. Glancing over, Hayasaka caught him clenching his fists, as if trying to hold himself together. As if he was trying to do what Hayasaka said before, to stay strong. But, his breathing revealed the whole shtick. It was terribly uneven and uneasy.

Hayasaka: "B-Brian… Hey, take deep breaths. Count to five when you breathe in, and five again when you breathe out."

Brian nodded, and began to follow his instructions. Hayasaka couldn't help but fall into the rhythm as well, which helped him to calm down and focus. Sticking down the last generous roll around of bandage, Hayasaka let out a breath. It was done. Brian was alright.

Eventually, muffled sounds started to emerge from outside the room. Footsteps and chatter could be heard, and Hayasaka assumed it was everyone else wondering what was going on. Yet, he just looked over at Brian.

Brian: “Y-You can let them in. It’s okay.”

With heavy steps, Hayasaka approached the infirmary door and let the group inside. Upon seeing the hospitalised Brian, everyone was quick to react in shock.

Latte: “Brian…! Oh my goodness! Are you alright, dear?!”

Jesse: “Holy shit! What happened to you, man?”

Kurumada: “Shit…”

Hayasaka remained quiet, opting to stay close beside Brian to double check his bandage was applied properly. He almost stuck his hand out in shock once L approached closer to the bed. He studied Brian’s wound for a while, the silence making Brian shrink in on himself.

L: “Brian… What happened here?”

Brian: “Well, y-you see…”

Brian sucked in a small breath.

Brian: “I had decided to investigate the second floor cubicles a bit more on my own. I, um, I really thought I could find a clue there if I just kept looking…”

Hayasaka: (“It appears we both had the same idea, huh?”)

Brian: “But, while I was searching around, I was suddenly attacked. I got knocked to the floor, and my leg was grabbed, squeezed, t-twisted, ah… You get it.”

Natsuki: “Oh my god… That’s just screwed up. Who the hell did that to you?”

Brian: “I…I don’t know. I didn’t see them — I guess since they had snuck up behind me — but they ran away soon after. That was when I heard Hayasaka’s voice and saw him running towards me.”

Hayasaka: “That… I had heard Brian yell out as I was climbing the stairs to the second floor to investigate more myself. Unfortunately, I must’ve just missed the assailant as well…”

Latte: “Oh gosh… This all sounds so horrible! I mean, who would even want to hurt someone as harmless and sweet as you, Brian?”

Jesse: “Shit, you don’t think it was… y’know… Whoever got Brian as their target?”

Saiki: “ *You mean to say someone’s already gone and broken our promise in less than twenty-four hours* ?”

Hayasaka: (“No, that can’t be the case. *I* have Brian as my target. But, ah, I can’t tell them that, can I…?”)

L: “Brian. I want to be sure. Are you certain you were attacked by someone, and then, as Hayasaka came running upon hearing you yell, this person proceeded to flee the scene?”

Brian: “Y…Yes. That’s what happened.”

L: “Hm… I see.”

L then turned to the group.

L: “I suspect this was no ordinary attack. No, this was carried out by a *traitor* .”

Natsuki: “A *what* now…?!”

Kurumada: “Hang on, what the hell are you talking about now? A *traitor* ?”

Jesse: “Yeah, fill us in a little here, yo.”

Saiki: “ *Oh, that theory, is it* ?”

L: “You see, I’ve had this growing idea for a while now that one of us in the group is secretly working for Nesos under the role of a traitor. And, this traitor may have been the one to attack Brian.”

Brian: “A-Are you saying… Whoever attacked me is standing here right now…?”

L: “Yes. I suppose that would be the case.”

Hayasaka: “...”

FLASHBACK

L: “We can’t be dead set on a single suspect, however. That would only cloud our judgement.”

Hayasaka: “...Then, are you saying you want us to suspect everyone else?”

L remained silent at the question, before shaking his head.

L: “As a detective, it’s best to keep an open mind.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("To think we'd be back at that dilemma. Yet, with everyone left… I just can't see it. I just can't see anyone being the traitor, or attacking Brian.")

Jesse: "Hey, maybe it's not a traitor? It could be just someone from Nesos who attacked you."

Brian: "T-That doesn't really make it much better…"

Natsuki: "So, what? Are we even safe to keep walking around anymore after this? Someone else could be attacked too, y'know?"

L: "No, I have reason to believe that Brian was specifically targeted."

Latte: "But why him?"

L: "Well… It may have something to do with him being the one to have crawled through the vents yesterday…"

Brian: "B-But I… You said, you said it would be fine, that I wasn't spotted. You said–"

L: "I know what I said, Brian. I will admit… Perhaps I made a miscalculation."

Brian: "..."

Jesse: "What? Come on! So my distraction scheme was all a flop?"

Saiki: " *It wasn't much of a distraction in the first place. It was doomed to fail from the start* ."

Kurumada: “Still, shouldn’t we focus on what’s in front of us? What are we gonna do about Brian?”

Hayasaka: “Ah… I-I’ll volunteer to take care of him until he’s fine to walk again. After all, I was the first one to find him, so I’ll shoulder the responsibility. I should be alright with my medical knowledge, too.”

Kurumada gave him a pat on the shoulder.

Kurumada: “Ah, hear that? You’re becomin’ a real doctor at this rate, haha.”

Hayasaka: “H-Hardly… I’m just doing it for Brian.”

Brian: “I…I don’t mind that. Thank you, Hayasaka.”

Brian smiled at Hayasaka, and he felt his chest warm. Flicking his eyes over to L, however, Hayasaka noticed his face was hard to read, but he could figure out he was contemplating things.

Hayasaka: (“L… What’re you thinking about now? I feel, deep down, he feels bad for what happened to Brian. Or, maybe not. That’s what I just want to believe.”)

Before he could ask, however, the group slowly began to leave, no longer needing to stick around. The air had become harsh. Were they scared of hanging around in such a place where Nesos and this attacker could be lurking around any corner? Hayasaka couldn’t blame them. But, he wouldn't leave, as much as his mind wanted him to. He was going to stay right there by Brian’s side.

He took a seat on Brian’s new bed for the foreseeable future. But, it wouldn’t be a long future, Hayasaka hoped.

Time passed, and only light conversation was exchanged between the two. Discussing anything they found on the second floor, complaints about the smells of the medicine behind the cabinet doors, awkward chuckles when they lingered eye contact for too long. For anyone else, they would've thought it was the most boring thing in the world. Hayasaka didn't care. This was his purpose now.

It was only then when the infirmary door creaked open Hayasaka snapped back to reality. Glancing at the person trudging inside, his eyes briefly widened.

Hayasaka: "L…?"

L didn't reply. Instead, he perched upon a nearby unoccupied bed.

L: "...I just wish to sit and observe."

Raising a brow, Hayasaka looked towards Brian. He shrugged back.

L: "...Brian."

Brian: "Huh?"

L: "I apologise for my rash actions. What you did in the vents most likely led to your current injury. It was my experiment that caused this to happen."

Brian: "Ah… N-No, please, don't blame yourself. I was the one who volunteered to go into the vents, so it's only my fault I was punished for it."

L: "You're always rather selfless, aren't you?"

Hayasaka: "Don't think too hard about that. It's really just the worker's modesty."

Brian: “Mm… For me, I understand when someone makes a mistake. I can’t find it in myself to get mad at them for it.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s rather comical to say about L of all people.”)

Brian: “I’m sure you were just trying to assure me and yourself things had gone to plan. It’s just… I want to do all I can to help you figure out Nesos’ identity, L. Even in the state I’m in now. I–...”

Brian choked on his words. He shook his head.

Hayasaka: “Brian… Is everything alright?”

Brian: “Hey… Do you guys think I’m stupid?”

Hayasaka was dumbfounded at such a question. Yet, Brian’s sad smile only made him feel empty.

Hayasaka: “What do you mean by that…?”

Brian: “I’ve always really admired how well you two work with logic in trials and clues you find around the islands. L, you’re always one step ahead of us, challenging the truth. And, Hayasaka, you’ve made so much improvement on yourself, it almost makes me jealous. But, me? What have I done? I’m not doing enough to even be considered close to your level, or to be helpful. Even when I was trying to solve the mysteries behind Sintracorp, it just felt like I was being told the answers by other people rather than figuring out anything by myself…”

Hayasaka: (“Brian… You really think so low of yourself, don’t you? It’s a mindset I share in some aspects, but this… It feels he doesn’t see anything he’s done as worthwhile.”)

L: “Brian, you may be one of the most competent individuals I have met on this island.”

Brian: “Huh…?”

L: “Yes, you have your ups, your downs, and certainly your goofs. But, I can see just how determined you are to do what’s right. After all, you wouldn’t have said all of that if you didn’t feel so strongly about your contribution here.”

Brian: “Ah…”

L: “I’m certain you have a lot of potential. You simply need to be more confident in yourself. Just as Hayasaka has.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? L, what’re you saying? I stutter just about every argument I make, h-haha…”

L: “Stutters are not a sign of weakness.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...Hey, L. Thank you. You really are a good friend.”

L: “Friend…?”

Hayasaka watched as L turned his head away.

L: “...Yes. Friends.”

Hayasaka: (“Is he… flustered? Surely not…”)

Noiseless minutes passed before L picked himself up from the bed.

L: “Well then, I’ll let myself out. It’s about time for my usual snacking hour.”

Stopping at the doorway, L turned back to the two.

L: “This conversation has helped me gain my thoughts very well.”

And he was gone. Hayasaka and Brian shared a glance of confusion, but brushed it off for now.

Time continued to pass, and the sky beyond the windows dimmed down into a bleak night sky. At any moment, Hayasaka assumed the nighttime announcement would ring out.

Brian: “Hey, Hayasaka. You should head back to the hotel now, before Monotora’s let out.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Are you sure you don’t want me to stay with you? There’s plenty of beds I could take. Also, we know Monotora won’t be roaming – they’re most likely just at the factory again like Moony told us.”

Brian: “But, still, it’s probably better if everyone knew you were safe back at the hotel for the morning.”

Hayasaka: “How about you? I don’t know if you’ll be safe here on your own…”

Brian: “I’ll be fine on my own, I promise. But, if I ever need help, I can contact you with the messaging app, right? If I ever figure out how to use it, that is…”

Hayasaka: (“That doesn’t sound very reassuring…”)

Shaking his head, Hayasaka stood up from the bed.

Hayasaka: “Alright. I’ll trust you on that. Goodnight, Brian.”

Brian: “Goodnight.”

A long walk through the brisk night air eased Hayasaka’s anxieties as he returned to the hotel. Upon entering his room, he felt himself physically collapse as he sat down on his bed, as if a pent up weight had been dropped all at once.

Hayasaka: (“I’m so tired… So much pressure today. And yet, I’m just so glad Brian is safe. If I had found him before whoever attacked him could do anything worse…”)

PING

Hayasaka took out his tablet to see a new message had been sent to him, privately.

[11:55 PM] Kurumada: are u still at the infirmary?

[11:55 PM] Kurumada: i think u should come back

[11:55 PM] Kurumada: not cuz i think u should leave brian or nothin

[11:56 PM] Kurumada: i was just thinkin about u

Hayasaka sighed, feeling a smile spread on his lips.

[11:58 PM] Hayasaka: I just got back to my hotel room. I appreciate you thinking about me.

[11:58 PM] Kurumada: hahaha always so formal when u text

[11:59 PM] Kurumada: thats good tho

[11:59 PM] Kurumada: u must be damn tired tho

DING DONG, BING BONG

Somehow, Hayasaka swore he heard a ‘fuck’ in the next room over.

[12:00 AM] Kurumada: nvm i wont keep u up

[12:00 AM] Kurumada: nite saka

[12:01 AM] Hayasaka: Goodnight, Kurumada.

Setting his tablet aside, Hayasaka held back a chuckle. He felt just a little bit better than before, and he mentally thanked Kurumada’s abrasive messages from snapping him away from his bad thoughts. Getting under the covers, he soon went to sleep.

-MONOTORA FILES-

???#1: “Where in god’s name is he? He’s supposed to be here as per his request.”

???#2: “Yeah, a bit strange isn’t it? I’m sure he’s around here somewhere. Maybe he’s on his way now.”

???#1: “Surely he’d be here by the time we arrived, he seemed frantic about something when he spoke to us before.”

FLASHBACK

???#3: “Carmen, Francis, I know this is on such short notice, but there’s something I need to discuss. I need the both of you to meet me inside the warehouse. Behind the crates preferably, there shouldn't be any cameras around there."

FLASHBACK END

Carmen: "It definitely seems serious, since he's only asked the two of us to see him."

Francis: "I suppose that we should visit his office at least, that's the only other place you'll find him."

CREAK

Carmen: "Hello? It's me, Carmen. Francis is with me as well. We're coming in… He's not here."

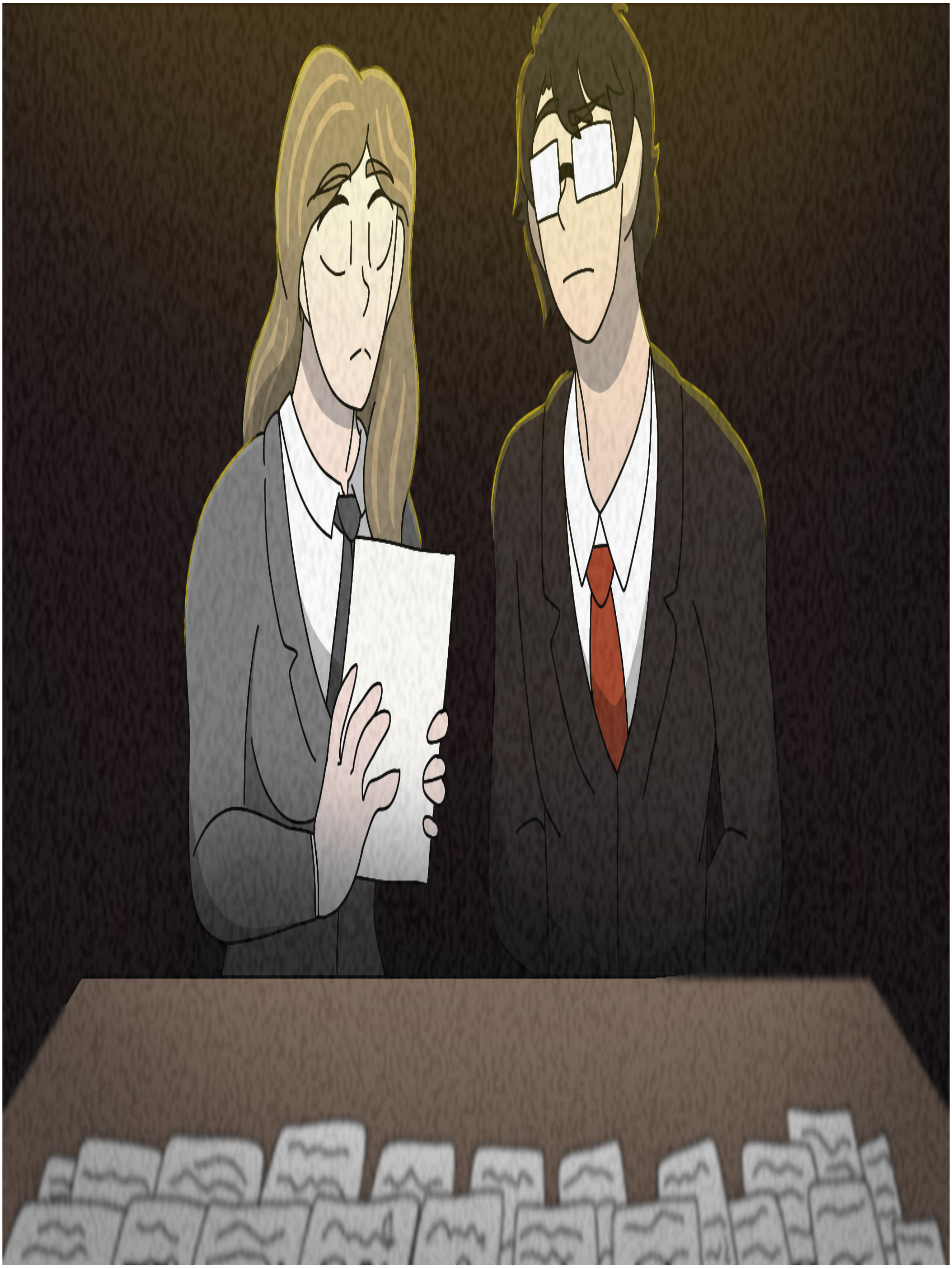
Francis: "Where on earth is that daft engineer? This is ridiculous of him. His room could do with a clean, it's all covered in paperwork."

Carmen: "Wait a second, he's left some files for us."

Francis: "Let's see… It's all the recent observations with Monotora. They do seem a lot different now comparing the oldest and recent notes."

Carmen: "Hang on a moment, he's left something else behind. It's written by hand."

Francis: "It's not blueprints? Well that's new for him. Well what does it say?"



Carmen: “ *To whoever wants to take down this shitty company once and for all…* ”

…

Francis: “Dear god…”

Carmen: “T-This is… terrible…”

DING DONG, BING BONG

Walking into the restaurant, Hayasaka was yet again met with a familiar sight for sore eyes. Natsuki and Jesse were baking away, laughing and talking a lot livelier than the morning two days ago.

Hayasaka: (“It appears they’re getting more confident baking together… That’s good to see.”)

Jesse: “G’mornin’, Mr. Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Good morning. Muffins again, is it?”

Natsuki: “Yeah. Everyone really liked them the last time we made them. But, I know we can make them better.”

Hayasaka: “I won’t deny I was a fan too, h-haha. I’m looking forward to trying this new batch– *ah* …”

Natsuki: “What is it?”

Hayasaka: “I just realised… Brian is all the way over in Nesos HQ. I’ll have to bring some to him, if you don’t mind.”

Jesse: “No problems here, yo.”

When the muffins were ready, Hayasaka was given a separate tray with a few fresh to go.

Latte: “Oh, are you bringing some breakfast to Brian? Here, let me make a latte for him to help him get better.”

Saiki: “ *How will a latte help him heal exactly* ?”

A steamy latte was then added to the tray. As Hayasaka went to pick everything up, a hand was placed on his shoulder.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. Mind if I tag along with ya? I’d just like to see you there safe.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, sure.”

The walk over was calming, although a little aggravating as Hayasaka attempted to keep everything balanced and the latte from cooling down too much. Halfway there, Kurumada opted to take the tray from him after seeing how everything had begun to wobble a little too much under his grip. Arriving at the infirmary, they saw Brian was already awake, glancing out the window beside his bed. He noticed the two, but especially the tray of goods, and an enticed look wiped across his face.

Hayasaka: “Good morning, Brian. Did you sleep well?”

Brian: “Yep. Just about. Uh, is that for…?”

Kurumada: “All yours.”

Kurumada set the tray down beside the bed.

Hayasaka: “The muffins are from Natsuki and Jesse, and the latte is from… ah, Latte.”

Brian: “Wow, you guys are really kind to do this, you know? I honestly wasn’t expecting you guys to care that much about me.”

Kurumada: “Like hell we wouldn’t! There ain’t many of us left – we gotta look out for each other, ‘specially the injured ones.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s a bit jarring seeing Kurumada act so kind towards Brian, considering their strains before, but… It’s nice to see. At the end of the day, he’s right: we need to look out for one another, don’t we?”)

As Brian picked up the mug from the tray, Hayasaka saw Kurumada turn to him.

Kurumada: “Speakin’ of which, I didn’t see ya with your usual coffee this mornin’.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, you’re right. In my worries about Brian, I must’ve forgotten to make myself one.”

Kurumada: “But, you *have* been eatin’ right since Mai died, haven’t ya?”

Hayasaka: “W-Well…”

Kurumada: “Ah, dammit…! I knew I should’a kept a better eye on ya.”

Hayasaka: “N-No, really, it’s okay…! I don’t usually eat breakfast very much anyhow, h-haha…”

Just then, a muffin was held out towards him.

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Brian: “I can’t see myself eating all of these.”

Staring at the offer, Hayasaka dropped his shoulders as he accepted the muffin.

Hayasaka: “Thank you, Brian…”

Kurumada: “One muffin still won’t cut it. Let’s go back to the restaurant to have a proper breakfast, yeah?”

Hayasaka: “But, I just got here. I can’t leave…”

Brian: “Go have breakfast, Hayasaka. I’ll be fine here. I don’t want to force you to stay here all day when you could be doing other things, too.”

Brian’s eyes had become firm, and Hayasaka could see how hard he was trying to reassure him.

Hayasaka: “A-Alright. But, I’ll come back soon.”

Returning to the restaurant, Hayasaka partook in a breakfast much longer for his liking. However, he reckoned taking a moment every once in a while to wind down wasn’t so bad. After he was let off by Kurumada, Hayasaka was free with some time on his hands.

Hayasaka: (“I’ll just have a chat with someone before I go check on Brian, huh?”)

FREE TIME

Hayasaka found Natsuki in the library.

Natsuki: “I want ice cream… But I don’t know if I should go with my usual strawberry or try something different…”

Hayasaka: “Hello, Natsuki.”

Natsuki: “Oh, hey Hayasaka. You wanna chat? I guess I’ll allow you, ‘cuz I know you’re not a creep. Although, you never really looked like a creep, anyway…”

Hayasaka spent some time with Natsuki. Holding back his anticipation, he gifted her the first volume of the Parfait Girls manga.

Natsuki: “Eh?! N-No way… How did you even find this?!”

Hayasaka: “I-It just came out of the gift machine in the hotel lobby, haha…”

Natsuki: “Really? Shoot, if only I knew that earlier… But, anyways, thank you for this. It really means a lot…”

Hayasaka: “I’m happy to know you like it.”

Natsuki: “Well, you’ve made a good decision by choosing to hang out with me today, as we’re gonna read manga together like you promised!”

Hayasaka: “Haha…” (“I’m glad to see her more upbeat than snarky, at least…”)

Natsuki: “Sit beside me. But not, like, too close. Unless you wanna be a creep.”

Hayasaka: “I-I really wasn’t intending to, anyhow…”

Hayasaka took a seat beside Natsuki, and as she opened up the manga they began to quietly read. Soon, he took quick notice of how Natsuki lightly giggled under her breath at a few scenes.

Natsuki: “Ahaha… I almost forgot about that part… How long has it been since I last read this?”

Hayasaka: “Haha…”

Natsuki: “ *What* ?”

Hayasaka: “Huh? What’s wrong?”

Natsuki: “Are you making fun of me? Am I not allowed to find it funny?”

Hayasaka: “N-No, not at all! I just found it charming how invested you are, t-that’s all, haha…”

Natsuki: “Well, duh, of course I’m invested in my *favourite* manga. T-That’s a stupid thing to say…”

Hayasaka: “...Natsuki. *Sigh* , is it alright if I ask you something? Why’re you so self-conscious about liking manga around other people…?”

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: “U-Unless that’s too personal for you to answer, then I apologise.”

Natsuki: “N-No, I think I’m comfortable enough to tell you. I can trust you not to tell anyone.”

Hayasaka: (“What does she mean by that…?”)

Natsuki: “Look, so… My dad doesn’t like manga. Or, well, doesn’t like me reading manga. Like, he doesn’t want to see it in the house, at least, so I have to stash it all in my locker or in the literature club closet.”

Hayasaka: “Wh…Why?”

Natsuki: “My dad doesn’t like a lot of things I do. But I still do them anyway, ‘cuz they don’t hurt anyone. T-That’s not to say he doesn’t do good things – he does! He gives me money, cooks me dinner…”

Hayasaka: (“Shouldn't that be the standard for all parents, regardless?”)

Natsuki: “...You’re going to tell someone, aren’t you?”

Hayasaka: “W-What?”

Natsuki: “I can see it on your face.”

Hayasaka: “No, Natsuki, I’m just… I won’t tell anyone if you don’t want me to, alright?”

Natsuki: “Swear you’ll keep it a secret?”

Hayasaka: “Y-Yes…”

Natsuki: “Good. God, I kinda wish you were my dad. You’re way nicer than him with this stuff – the manga, I mean.”

Hayasaka: (“Her dad, huh? Haha…”) “I don’t mind reading with you again in the future, if you’d like.”

Natsuki: “...Yeah, I would like that. Thanks, Hayasaka. Now, c’mon! I still wanna finish chapter one at least! You’re such a slow poke, haha!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, haha…?” (“Well, I’m glad I could make her happy again. I’m not too sure if I *can* keep her secret, well, secret, but for now, I’ll just focus on keeping her occupied with manga…”)

Time passed Hayasaka by faster than he expected as he had yet to check up on his so-called patient for the day.

Hayasaka: (“I should really head over there now…”)

PING

Before he could even think about making a move, his tablet caught his attention with a message.

Hayasaka: (“Ah, dear. That must be Brian wondering where I am…”)

When he read the sender’s name, however, he faltered.

[5:02PM] L: Good afternoon. I’d like to request everyone, par Brian who is currently immobilised, to gather at the restaurant. There is something very important I’d like to discuss with you all. Don’t keep me waiting, will you?

Hayasaka: (“...Another request so soon? Then again, what’s with that last line? It feels a bit pushy, doesn’t it? Although…”)

FLASHBACK

L: “This conversation has helped me gain my thoughts very well.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("L was quite distant ever since yesterday. Even in the restaurant this morning, he didn't say a word. There's definitely something going on, although I'm unsure what… He did seem very remorseful towards Brian, however. I should have faith in L, shouldn't I?")

Rerouting towards the hotel, Hayasaka arrived at the restaurant. He saw everyone else, and L standing in front of them all. But, something was off.

L's face was as blank as usual. Yet, as Hayasaka peered closer, he saw it. A darkness just beyond his eyes. Something was hidden behind them; the longer he looked, the more a lurking dred crept up his spine. He didn't know if he was just imagining things, but he slid a step back just in case.

Jesse: "Yo, what's up then? Why'd you call us here?"

L: "I'm very grateful you've all made it here. You're all very reliable, hm?"

Natsuki: "Uh, what?"

Ignoring the growing confusion, L simply continued on.

L: "Ever since Brian was attacked by the traitor, I've become insistent on figuring out their identity."

Saiki: " *You're acting like you know for certain it was the traitor* ."

Hayasaka: "W-Well… I'd like to help you figure out who attacked Brian as well. We should do it for his sake, right?"

L: "Oh, I don't need any help. I've already put my plan in action to weed them out."

Latte: “Huh? What do you mean?”

L: “There’s no way to put this lightly. *I’ve planted a set of bombs somewhere on these islands* .”

Hayasaka: “You… *You what* …?”

Jesse: “What the hell, man?! Is this some kinda weird joke you’re tryn’a pull?!”

L: “I wouldn’t joke about something like this.”

Natsuki: “Is–Is *that* a joke…?!”

Kurumada: “What the fuck are you even talking about, anyway?! *Bombs* ? Since when have we been given access to bombs?!”

Saiki: “ *...The third motive. There were bombs inside those handcuffs we were forced to wear* .”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

L: “Indeed. Don’t you remember? When the handcuffs were removed from everyone during the investigation, I decided to secretly collect them after the third trial so I could analyse them in my hotel room.”

Natsuki: “Like that was even possible…! Doesn’t everything from the murders get cleaned up?”

Hayasaka: “No… Perhaps Nesos thought nothing of it at the time. The motive was null at that point, so they likely didn’t care what L did with them.”

Latte: “So did you place those handcuffs around the islands?”

L: “It’s a little more sophisticated than that, you’d find. I managed to extract all the bombs inside the handcuffs so I could modify them to my will. It was rather unfortunate that Yuri’s handcuff had been melted into useless metal, and Ena’s was impossible to retrieve as it still resided on their wrist. Regardless, I was satisfied with ten bombs at my disposal.”

Jesse: “Still, like, how much damage could they even do? We never actually saw one go off.”

L: “It was implied that one bomb was enough to blow up a single person. So, I’d imagine ten times that would cause quite a lot of damage, wouldn’t you agree?”

Kurumada: “Then where the hell are they?!”

L: “Hum, let’s see… I could’ve planted one each in your hotel rooms. Or, maybe I hid a few here in the restaurant where we’re standing right now. Or perhaps I analysed where each and every one of you frequented on the islands the most and placed one there. Or I could’ve placed them somewhere you’d least expect.”

At every tease, L’s eyes grew colder and colder.

L: “In other words, no matter where you may run or hide, you’ll never truly know if you’re safe from an explosive fate.”

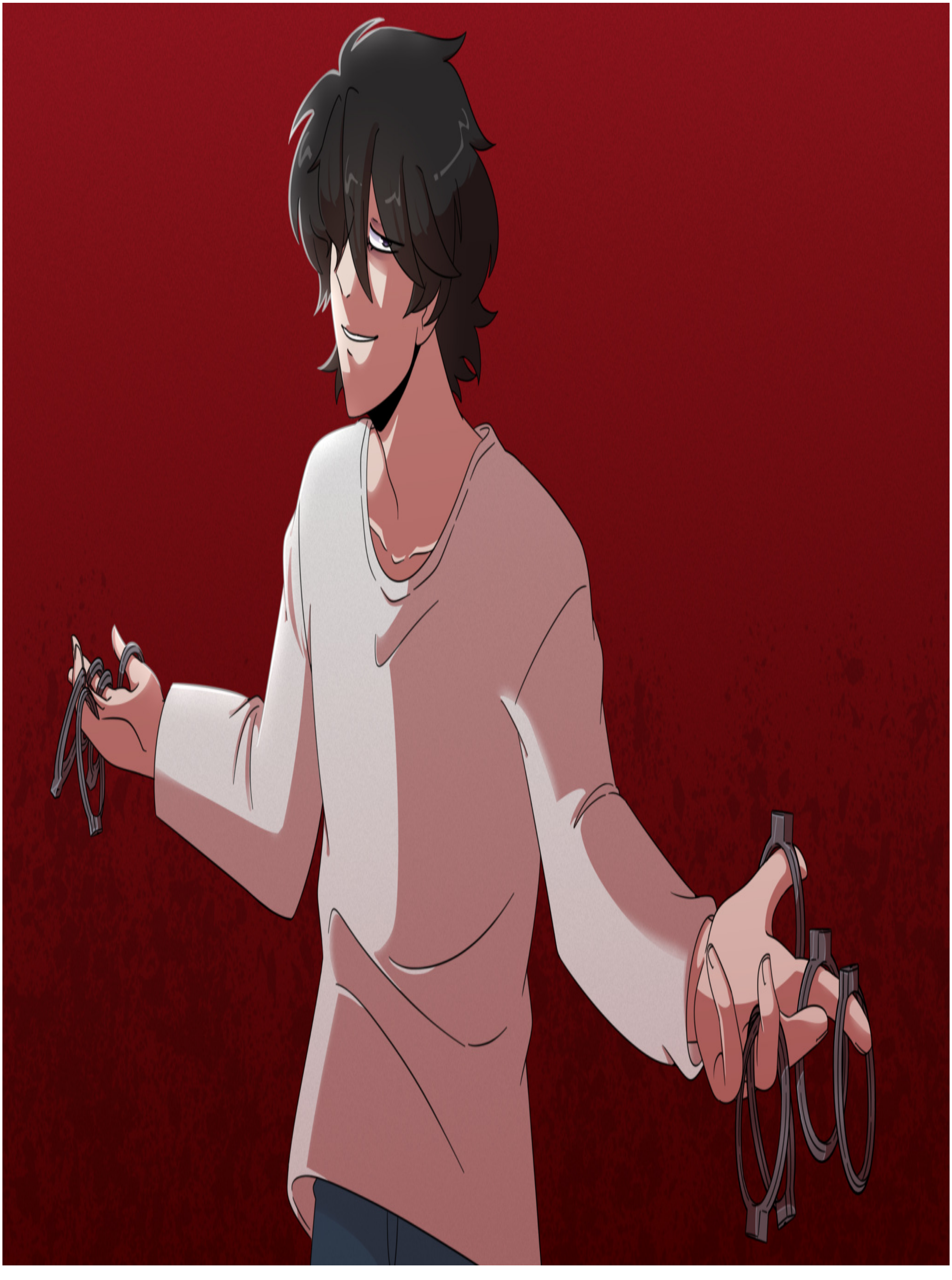
Hayasaka: (“I wish I could doubt L. I wish so hard that I could. But, I know his abilities too well. He’s such an incredible analyst. There’s no possible way I could even pretend to know better than him. There really is no telling where he hid the bombs.”)

Natsuki: “Y…You have to be lying. This is all just one big lie, isn’t it?”

Latte: “Yes, he has to be. I can’t believe you’d do such a thing, putting us all in such unnecessary danger.”

L: “ *Sigh … Why do they never believe me* ?”

Clicking his tongue in annoyance as if this was all a mild inconvenience to him, L reached deep into both of his pockets. What he retrieved had everyone frozen in shock.



L: “I’m not lying. Do you believe me now?”

Swinging about the handcuffs on his fingers, L gave a chilling smirk. Hayasaka had never seen him so terrifying before.

Saiki: “ *What the hell does any of this even have to do with the traitor* ?”

L: “I’ll get to that in due time. You see, I’ve reconfigured the bombs to explode in the next twenty-four hours.”

Hayasaka: “Reconfigure…? How could you tamper with the bombs without them going off?”

L: “Oh, it’s very simple. I used the technology in the VR facility to safely recode the bombs to my liking. Perhaps I’ve even made them stronger than their original state in the third motive.”

Letting each handcuff drop to the ground with a clink one by one, L glanced around at the group.

L: “Here’s the deal: I’ll disarm the bombs only when the traitor reveals themself to me and allows me to question them on their motives.”

Jesse: “Argh! That’s just insane! You’ve completely lost it, jackass!”

Kurumada: “What makes you think ya had any right to go and threaten everyone’s lives over a damn traitor that hasn’t even been confirmed to exist?!”

L: “I assure you that we’ll find out soon enough if the traitor does exist or not. If they wish to save everyone else, and more importantly themselves, they’ll have to come clean at some point. That being said, would the traitor care to come forward for us now?”

Not a single movement was made. L nodded to no one in particular.

L: “Of course. I assumed this would happen.”

Natsuki: “If you knew no one would say anything, then why the hell did you go through with your suicidal plan in the first place?!”

L: “The traitor *will* eventually reveal themself. That’s why I gave them quite the generous time limit to do so. And, when they do decide to confess, they can find me at Nesos HQ. Surely, they’re already quite familiar with the building they’ve been working under, so I deem it the best place to converse with them.”

L then trudged past everyone towards the restaurant doors. He barely turned his head back enough as he muttered one last message.

L: “I’m excited to meet you. Let us have a good chat when the time comes.”

Hayasaka turned his head away before he could watch him disappear. He didn’t want to stare at such a sadistic face on someone he thought he could trust any longer.

But that moment of silence hardly lasted as the group began to panic.

Latte: “W-What should we do? Oh, this is so horrible!”

Jesse: “Screw it! We should just look for those damn bombs ourselves!”

Kurumada: “It’s the only thing we can do at this point. That bastard didn’t give us much of a choice.”

Saiki: “ *Will anyone even go to see L* ?”

Natsuki: “If there was a traitor, they would’ve already outed themselves to L when they had the chance!”

Jesse: “Hey, I’ll look around this island, yeah? I gotta feeling he hid some bombs in our hotel rooms so we can’t sleep in ‘em.”

Natsuki: “That’s a good idea! I’ll help you look around!”

Kurumada: “Let me take the second island in that case. It’s a big place full of a lot of facilities to check, n’ I can move pretty fast.”

Latte: “Please let me search the third island! I go there very often, so I have a good feel for it.”

Saiki: “ *I suppose I’ll take the fourth island. I can check the VR facility in case L left any clues behind there* .”

Hayasaka: (“And, that leaves me…”) “... *The fifth island* .”

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka, you can come help me out on the second island if you don’t wanna go.”

Hayasaka: “N-No, I’ll be fine. I still need to check up on Brian, anyway.”

Kurumada: “Are ya sure? What if you run into L and he thinks you’ve come to confess you’re the traitor or somethin’?”

Hayasaka: “...If that does happen, I’ll just tell him why I’m really there. What can he do otherwise?”

Kurumada: “I guess you got a point. Just stay safe, alright?”

Jesse: “C’mon! Let’s get searchin’!”

Latte: “Let’s not leave a single place unturned!”

At that, the group split up to their respective islands in search of the bombs. Hayasaka, the slight outlier in the bomb-search scheme, made his way towards Nesos HQ. Climbing up the stairs to the third floor, he was a little glad L was nowhere to be seen as of now. Opening the door to the infirmary, he saw Brian laying down and staring up at the ceiling with a blank look. Noticing Hayasaka’s arrival, he sat up.

Brian: “Oh, hey.”

Hayasaka: “Hello. I believe it’s time we reapply your bandages.”

He tried to act as casually as possible, but as he got to work, Hayasaka could feel Brian’s concerned eyes boring into him.

Brian: “Is everything alright? You look a bit shaken.”

Hayasaka: (“I don’t necessarily want to come out about the bombs all at once. It’d be bad to cause him worry in his state.”) “I’m fine. By any chance, have you seen L come here?”

Brian: “L? No, I haven’t seen him. Although, I did hear someone climb the stairs a little earlier on. I thought it was you at first, so I was kind of waiting for the door to open… But it didn’t.”

Hayasaka: (“L must be waiting somewhere on the upper floors in that case.”)

Brian: “What’s going on, then? Why did you ask me about L?”

Hayasaka: “...I suppose I shouldn’t keep quiet about it. L… has threatened us with bombs.”

Brian: “He what…? Uh, did I hear that right? Haha…”

Hayasaka: “L modified the bombs inside the handcuffs from the third motive and hid them somewhere around the islands. He’s doing it in order to gain a confession from the theorised traitor.”

Brian: “Haha… Why’re you explaining it like it’s not a joke? It is a… joke, right?”

Hayasaka couldn’t muster to look at him. Brian faltered.

Brian: “Oh… *Okay* .”

Twiddling his thumbs, Brian’s eyebrows furrowed.

Brian: “Would L… really do something like that? Would he do something so extreme just to weed out this traitor?”

Hayasaka: “Well… While L has been rather unpredictable from time to time, it’s true I’d never think he’d go this far.”

Brian: “No, it’s just that… Ah, nevermind. This is probably from what happened to me that made L start this, right?”

Hayasaka: “Please don’t blame yourself, Brian. L had stolen the handcuffs all the way back during the third case. If anything, he could’ve been planning something like this for a while.”

Brian: “How’re the others coping with this?”

Hayasaka: “It’s an agreed outrage. They’re currently searching the islands for the bombs.”

Brian: “But… What if they can’t find them? If no one confesses to being the traitor, then L would’ve been wrong the whole time. Does that mean we’ll be in danger?”

Everything Brian said was exactly the thoughts Hayasaka had attempted to hold back this whole time. Like a needle piercing his brain, he felt the energy deplete out of him. He dropped down onto the edge of Brian's bed, shutting his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose.

Hayasaka: " *...Shit* ."

Brian: " *Hayasaka...* !"

Hayasaka: "Ah, m-my apologies for the foul language. I've just… hit a breaking point, I suppose. I'm much too stressed to handle everything that's happening anymore. Well, it wasn't like I could before…"

Brian: "...If it helps, I trust that you aren't the traitor."

Hayasaka: "Huh? How would you know that?"

Brian: "You were the one to find me when I was being attacked, right? I even heard you calling out from far away. So, it would've been impossible that it was you who attacked me."

Hayasaka: "I suppose you have a point. But, it was all a coincidence, really."

Brian shook his head.

Brian: "Even if I didn't have the evidence to prove your innocence, I would still believe in you."

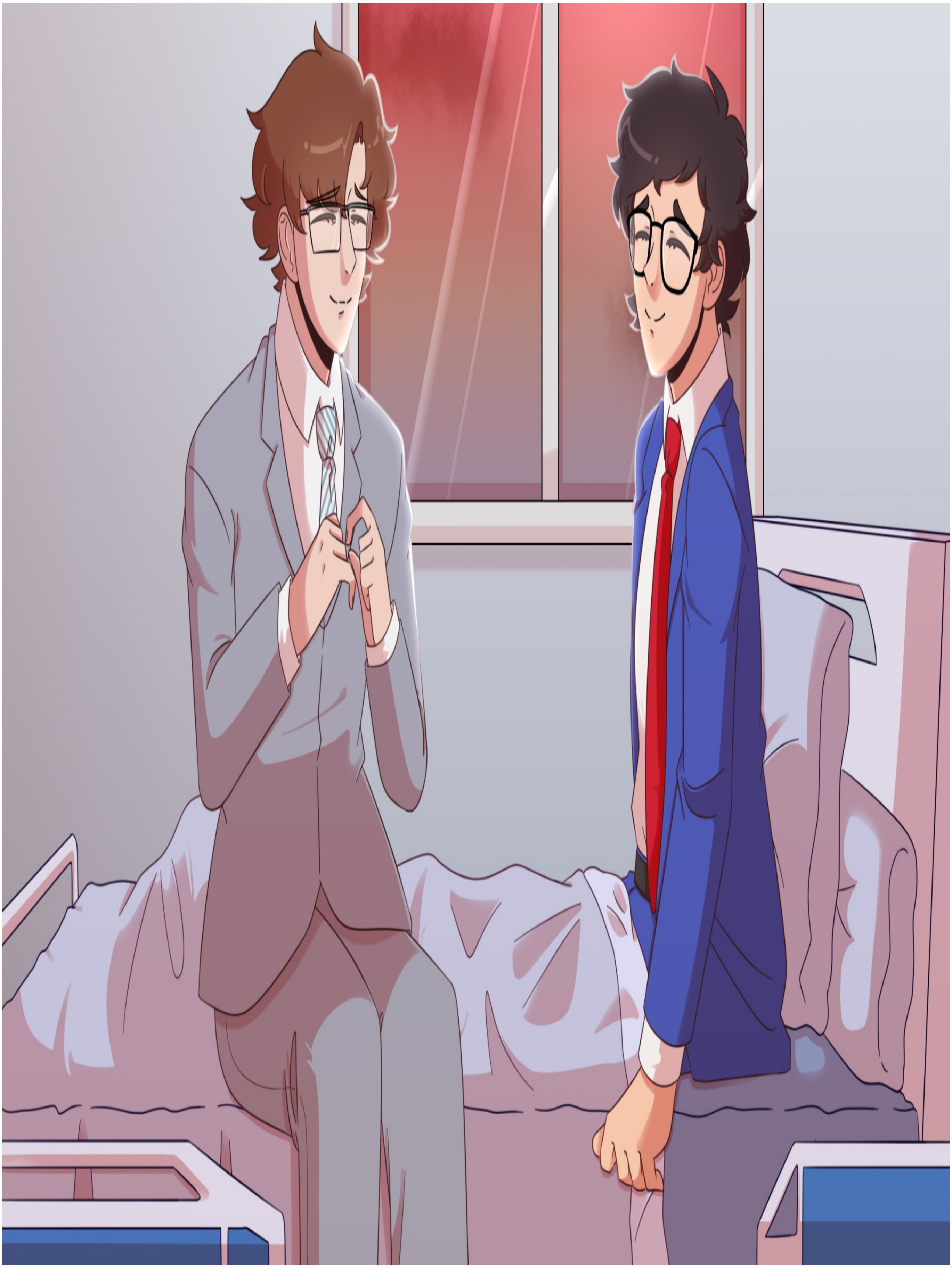
Hayasaka: "Wh… You would…?"

Brian: "Hayasaka… Hah, how do I put this? You know, ever since you asked to sit with me all those mornings ago, I've been so grateful for our friendship. I really felt like I've had someone to trust all this time in this death game where trust is near impossible. E-Especially for a nervous guy with a talent such as the Ultimate Witch Hunter, haha."

Hayasaka: "Brian…"

Brian: "Even if I'm not really seen as anyone special here, it's nice to know I can relate to someone on a similar level to me, and that you're willing to do all of these things for me. It just… makes me feel pretty happy despite all the bad things happening around us."

This time, Brian's smile was wide. It was thankful, bright and confident in what he said. It was so contagious that Hayasaka found himself matching it back.



Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m truly glad to have befriended you as well, Brian. Despite the situation it took for us to meet, I would be disappointed to have never met you.”

The growing concerns about the bombs were overcome by the starkly peaceful atmosphere the two cherished for the rest of the evening. They talked about this, about that, and the sun fell deep into the horizon.

Brian: “Oh wow, it’s gotten pretty late, hasn’t it? You should really head back to the hotel to get some sleep.”

Hayasaka: “I suppose I should. Since the bombs won’t be going off yet, I should be safe to sleep there tonight at the very least.”

At that, Hayasaka stood up.

Hayasaka: “Goodnight, Brian. Try not to worry so much, alright? We’ll figure something out.”

Brian: “That goes for you too. Goodnight!”

Leaving the infirmary and making his way towards the stairs, Hayasaka attempted to ignore his racing heart.

Hayasaka: (“I should go see how everyone’s doing while I walk back to the hotel. It’s been a while, so surely someone has found something, right–”)

CRASH

Hayasaka froze at the top of the stairs. He shot his head up towards the opposite stairwell that led to the fourth floor.

Hayasaka: (“What… What was that sound? That definitely came from the fourth floor. But, isn’t L supposed to be up there somewhere? Wait, what if something happened? Oh god, then, I can’t leave it alone, can I?")

Turning on his heel, Hayasaka rushed oppositely up the stairs towards the floor above. He decided to check the storage room first, seeing as it was the main piece of the floor. Cautiously, he stepped inside. He couldn't see anything apart from tall shelves blocking his view.

Hayasaka: ("Could it have come from somewhere inside the room…?")

Taking slow, shallow steps further inside, Hayasaka peered between what he could of the shelves, which wasn't a lot at all.

Hayasaka: ("It was rather loud. Could–")

He stopped thinking. Why did he stop thinking?

Oh, because there was something wrapped around his neck.

Oh, because his breathing had become weak.

Oh, because the world was slowly turning dark.

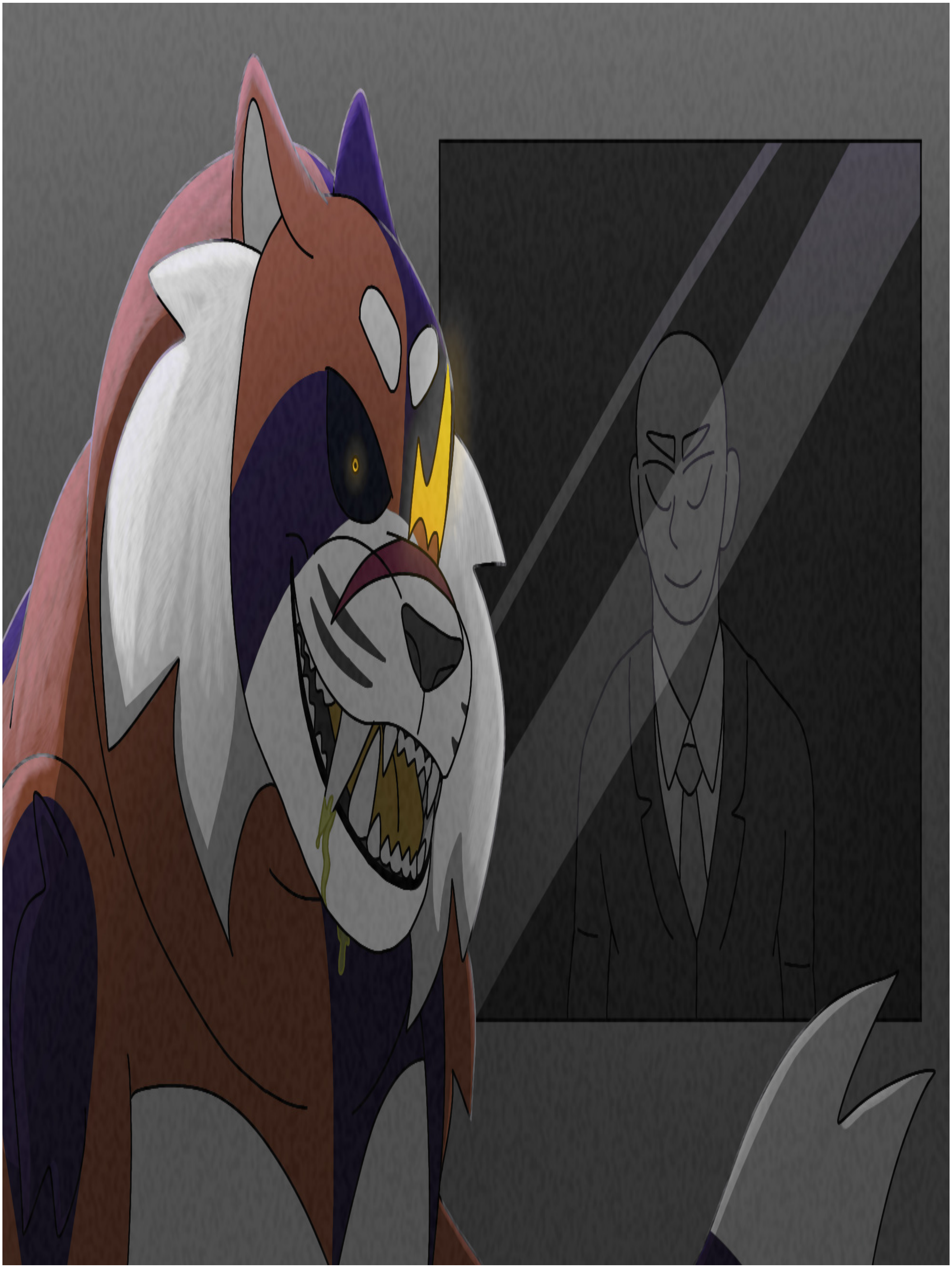
Oh, because the floor was suddenly so close to his face…

…

-MONOTORA FILES-

???#2: "Hello~ I'm here to record a test on Monotora's special feature. I've waited months for this very moment, and now I can finally see the punishment feature in action! Who's the test subject you ask? Well lucky for us, we have the perfect volunteer who I personally believe deserves this test very much. Bring him out fellas!”

THUD



???#1: “Ow… H-Hey! What’s going on?! Why am I here?!”

???#2: “Ah, this lovely worker here is the test subject for this experiment. I’ve never found him to be a trustworthy worker, but I’ve kept him around long enough to see this product be finished. You should’ve never been so nosy with my company and should’ve kept your head down low instead of going as far as you could to get all the information you seeked for.”

???#1: “Stop! Don’t do this! You can’t let this happen! Tora?! Don’t listen to the boss’ orders! Please!”

Monotora: “ *Hisssssssssssssss…* ”

???#2: “Now then, we’ve prepared a very special punishment for Macgyver, known as Guy by his colleagues. Well, *was* known. *Heheheh* .”

Guy: “Monotora! S-Stop! I’m begging you! Stay away! Don’t bite me!”

Monotora: “ *Grrrrrrr…* Heheheh…”

???#2: “It’s time to play with my prey. IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!! Ahahahahaha!”

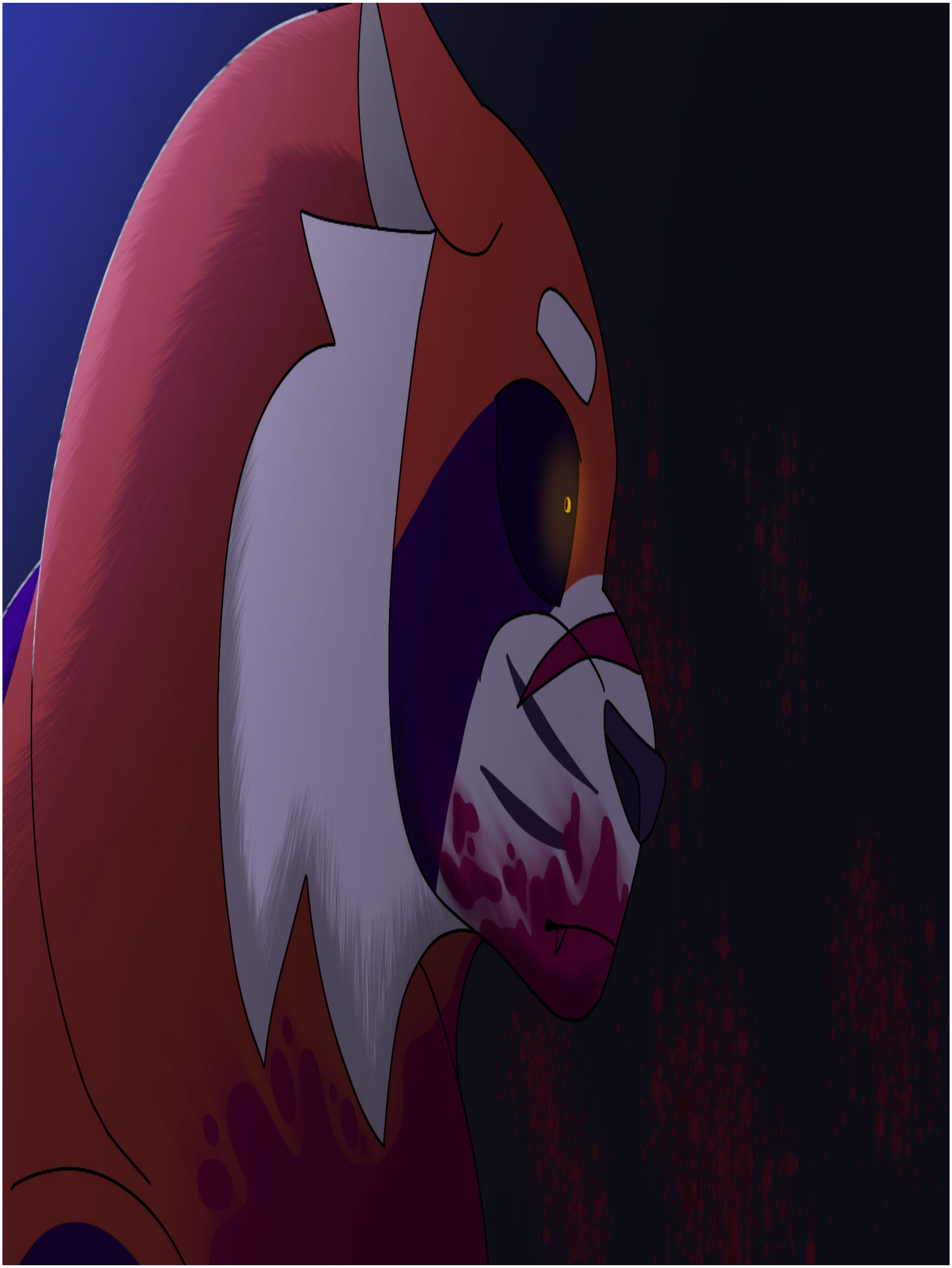
Monotora: “*Snarl… GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!!*”

Guy: “NO! NO! NO– *AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH* ….!!”

CHOMP

SQUELCH

TEAR



-KSHHHHH-

VIDEO ERROR.

…

…

…

Consciousness. The senses had finally come back to him. Hayasaka felt warm. Blasting warmth from above. Grainy warmth from below.

Right. His bed was a deep pool of grains.

Hayasaka: “Wh–Huh…?”

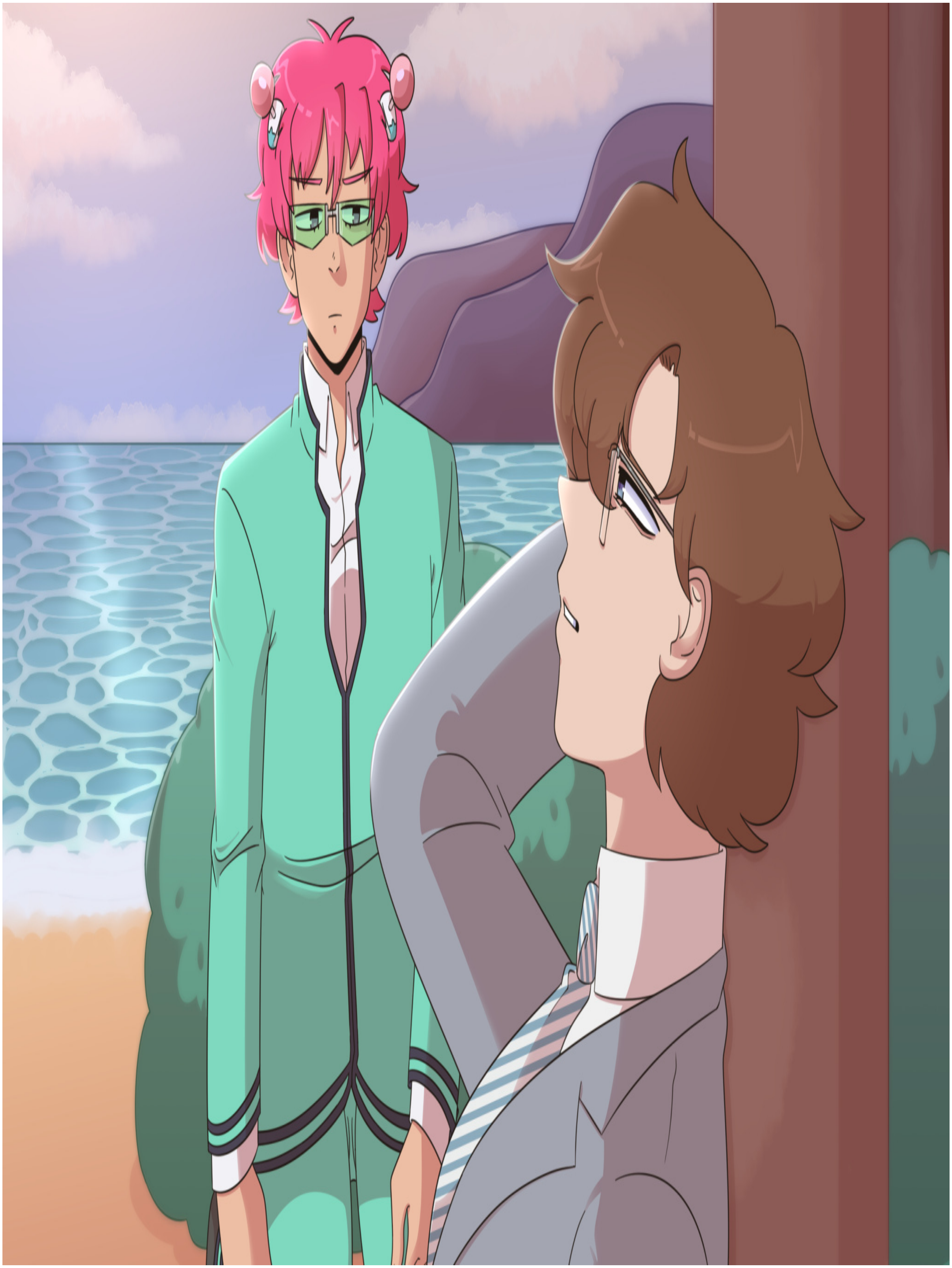
Opening his eyes, Hayasaka was pressed to squeeze them shut again. A blinding light overcame his vision, making him see blots of unrecognisable shapes and colours. Slowly, he opened them again.

This wasn’t his bed. Far, far from it. Literally.

Hayasaka: “The… *beach* …?”

It was déjà vu waking up in such a place. He was sure, at this very moment, he would overhear Mai slap Kurumada awake, and he himself would begin to freak out about being on an island.

But as he glanced beside him, the person staring back at him shattered the reality he wished to go back to.



Hayasaka: “S…Saiki…?”

Saiki didn’t respond. Holding his head, Hayasaka sat up.

Hayasaka: “What’s going on…?”

Saiki: “ *I can’t answer that. All I know is that you weren’t at the restaurant at your usual time, so I used clairvoyance to see you weren’t in your room. I went to look for you, and found you asleep here* .”

Hayasaka: “Oh…”

Saiki: “ *So, what are you doing here* ?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, uh… I… I can’t seem to remember. I swear the last place I was at was Nesos HQ. But…”

Both hands crept around the back of his head.

Hayasaka: “I can’t recall anything. My head… It hurts for some reason.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t strain yourself.* ”

Hayasaka: “...Wait, in that case, how is everyone? Did you find any of the bombs…?”

Saiki was quiet. Dred fizzled in his gut.

Saiki: “... *We weren’t successful.* ”

Hayasaka: “No… *No* … Then, what do we do? W-What are we going to do now…?”

Saiki: “ *Look, let’s just go back to the restaurant. Everyone else is already there.* ”

With not much else he could do, Hayasaka nodded. Picking himself up with some help from Saiki, the two walked back to the hotel. Entering the restaurant, he was grabbed hold of before he could even let out his next breath.

Kurumada: “Hayasaka…!”

Kurumada was staring at him with wide, relieved eyes.

Kurumada: “Thank fucking god you’re alright! I got so damn worried when you hadn’t shown up here yet…!”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry, Kurumada. I’m alright, really.”

Natsuki: “Well, you shouldn’t be. We still haven’t found a single bomb yet! We only have a few hours left until they go off, you know?!”

Hayasaka peered around the room at everyone else. Although fatigue plagued their eyes, they were all still standing, so nervous yet so determined.

Jesse: “Argh! I just wanna go n’ strangle the damn location outta L myself!”

Latte: “You know what? Why don’t we just all go and confront L together? That way, he can’t suspect any of us of being the traitor!”

Kurumada: “Doesn’t sound half-bad. And, if he still doesn’t wanna spill, I’ll just beat the shit outta him until he does.”

Hayasaka: ("I'm worried L won't exactly be able to say anything if he's been beaten, but… We should just go over there and demand he stop this stunt.")

With time running out for the group, they rushed over towards Nesos HQ.

Jesse: "Where the hell could L be? Should we split up and look for him?"

Latte: "But if someone finds him alone, he might suspect they're the traitor."

Natsuki: "Then let's just split off into groups!"

Hayasaka: "W-Wait. We may be able to cut down the possible locations L would be. As I didn't see him on my way to Brian on the third floor yesterday, he must be on one of the floors above."

Kurumada: "So the fourth or fifth? Got it! Let's just search those two floors together!"

Dashing up the stairs to the fourth floor, the group banded to search around. Finally, they checked inside the storage room, turning on the lights as they rushed inside. They went off in all different directions around the shelves. Hayasaka felt his head waver again. Holding a hand over his forehead, he stopped just in time before he bumped into Saiki.

Hayasaka: "Ah, s-sorry. I was just… *Saiki…* ?"

Saiki wasn't looking at him. In fact, his body was turned, focused on something else. Confusion built up in Hayasaka. But, something else had begun to take over, too.

He turned to face the same direction.

Skin turning cold. Hands shaking. Body growing heavy. From head to toe, an unpleasant, aching, throbbing feeling pierced every cell, numbing every limb.

‘It’s happened before’, said the mind. ‘You’ve seen this time and time again’, said the mind. ‘And yet, you’re still reacting like it’s the first time,’ teased the mind.

‘But, what else am I supposed to do?’ He argued back.

Because…

Because…

Because …

…

[BDA//VIDEO]

…

Sitting in the chair. Forced to sit forever on that chair. Bloody and bruised. The terrific detective, the unbeatable detective, the immortal detective, *L* , was dead.

Yes. Without a doubt, he was dead.

L was dead.

Chapter End Notes

L: blows up island with mind

Everyone: our fuckin island

RIP smartest character ever who will ever do my taxes now :-{

If there's something you're wondering about, there's a good chance it will be explained in the later parts of the chapter 🤫

also funfact I formatted this chapter while a Jerma stream played in the background lol (casino inc for anyone wondering)

Again, I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter!

Chapter 5: The Fault in Our Scars (Deadly Life)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> my lawyer died dawgggggg I'm going to jail 😫🤯🤣
>
> At a total count of 13k words, this marks the longest investigation chapter thus far for the fic ("are you mad at me?" I ask in an insecure partner voice)
>
> And an update for the 4 project sekai fans here: my lucky ass got the limited Ena in three 10 pulls so. guess I'm gonna be saving up plentiful for her birthday gacha hehehaha
>
> As always, let'sa go investigate! (where did that accent come from...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

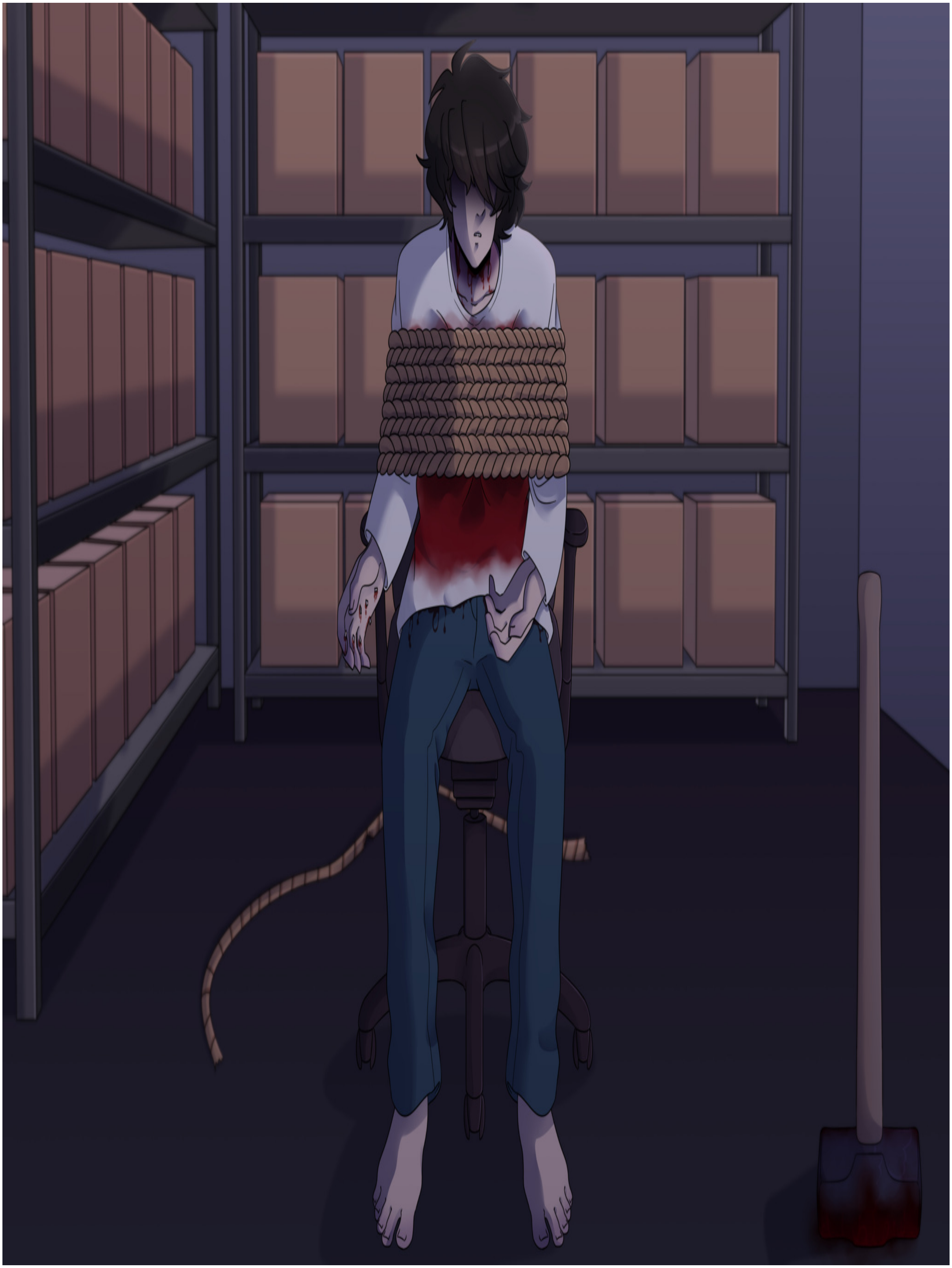
Hayasaka had now gone his current daily life witnessing the injuries, brutalities and blood soaked corpses of the people that passed him by. Gore-packed movies were now a fad to what he'd seen. The feel-bad news articles wished they had stories like this. Even when studying medicine, he had always wondered what an autopsy would look like. Him and death were walking the same path: a sentence repeated over and over that it had gotten so tiring.

No matter the person. No matter if the person was someone so useless. Someone so useful. Someone who shouldn't have died, but did.

It was disgusting. What was this? A bloody, bruised and beaten version of the man he thought could never be challenged, never be bested. It had to be a joke. He needed to reach out, touch him, feel his cold body to confirm it.

Looking wasn't enough anymore. He's seen enough as it is. Or maybe it was that investigative instinct kicking in. Hayasaka couldn't seem to distinguish it anymore.

After all, he knew that was all L's body was worth now. To be poked at. To be prodded at. To be the centre of the next talking point between whoever was left standing.



Hayasaka: ("I'm shaking… I'm shaking again, as if I haven't seen it all before. Is it still fear? Or is it shock? A loss of hope?")

An aching feeling washed over Hayasaka's head.

Hayasaka: ("And… Why do I feel such a strong connection to the storage room so suddenly? It's not like we knew L was going to be here…")

Kurumada: "Hey, what's goin' on over– *Eh* ?! What the fuck?!"

Natsuki: "Oh–! *Oh my god* !"

Jesse: "Shit! Shit…!"

Latte: "Oh my goddess! No…!"

Hayasaka could only blink at their reactions. He swore he heard them a moment ago, or maybe he had been already predicting their words.

Latte: "N…No. We were… going to come here to see L… But…"

Jesse: "How?! How the fuck did this happen?!"

Natsuki: "If he's really dead, then what about the bombs?! How are we gonna find out where they are now?!"

Kurumada: "Damnit! Damnit!!"

Saiki: "..."

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Well would ya look at that, a fresh piece of prey has been found! Well to those who haven't eaten a human, that's just a dead body–oh hang on, *one, two, three, four* ... We have everyone here except one person…”

Hayasaka: (“Brian…”)

Monotora: “Oh! I know who's missing. Very well then. Since this'll be a special reason, I'll bring 'em over myself – MOTHERFUCKER GET YER ASS HERE!”

Slightly baffled on what that meant, Hayasaka raised a brow before faint footsteps could be heard approaching the room. But what was more jarring was that they were accompanied by plastic clanks. Heading towards the doorway, the group were met with a peculiar sight. It was Brian, standing uncomfortably beside Monotora. But more importantly, he was *standing* .

Standing upright, with the support of a crutch.

Latte: “Brian? Are you alright…?”

Brian: “Um, y-yeah? I guess so. Monotora gave me this… crutch, and forced me to come up here.”

Monotora: “To see the new body, o’course! I don’t give out these favours for free, ‘specially to those like you.”

Brian: “R-Right… Uh, hang on. I heard the announcement play. Did–Did someone die? Who is it? *Wait* …”

Brian scanned around, an answer seeming to already be forming in his head.

Brian: “Where’s… L…?”

No one wanted to speak up. Instead, Hayasaka noiselessly stepped forward, gently taking the other’s hand and leading him towards where L’s body was sitting – just as still as it was before – in the chair. Brian’s face was unreadable. Somehow, Hayasaka felt worse looking at him than the one who was dead.

Brian then glanced down.

Brian: “Oh. Oh, I see.”

Monotora: “Gahaha!”

Monotora trotted up towards the group.

Monotora: “Not even Detective Sweet-tooth could weave his way through the death game, eh? He really lives up to his name, eh, eh? Heheh.”

As petty as it was, a quickened anger arose in Hayasaka at the blatant teasing. It wasn’t because they made fun of L. No, there would be no need to: L couldn’t hear any of what was being said. It was directed towards all of them, and in particular, Brian.

Hayasaka: “Y-You…!”

But, he didn’t know what to say exactly.

Kurumada: “ *Bastard* .”

Hayasaka felt satisfied with that, at the least.

Monotora: “...Empty words like that don’t hurt comin’ from meatbags.”

Jesse: “Hey, asshole! Where the hell are they? Where are the bombs?”

Monotora: “...Hm? Bombs?”

Natsuki: “Don’t play dumb with us! If L’s dead, then no one knows where they are! Shouldn’t even you guys be scared about when they’ll go off?”

Monotora: “Argh, will you shut up about all that bomb-crap? They’ve been dealt with already, alright?!”

Kurumada: “Dealt with? The hell d’ya mean by that?”

Saiki: “ *I bet Nesos already knew where the bombs were and diffused them* .”

Monotora: “Lalala! Lalala!”

Natsuki: “What the?! Why’re you singing for?”

Latte: “It doesn’t matter, surely. Saiki must be right, but they just don’t want to admit it for some reason.”

Jesse: “So? Where were they then? Did L hide some in the hotel?”

Monotora: “Lalala! I’m not telling you! Lalala!”

Kurumada: “Would ya stop singin’ already?!”

Monotora: “ *Siiiiigh* , then would ya bastards focus on the right thing here?! You should be all gawkin’ at the murder, not some borin’ ass bombscare!”

Hayasaka: (“Wait… If Monotora’s making us investigate L’s murder, then whoever had L as their target didn’t kill them, as we wouldn’t have a trial in that case. But then, who *did* kill L…?”)

Monotora: “See? See? Doctor Decipher looks deep in thought!”

Latte: “But, if Nesos already knew about the bombs, then why didn’t they turn them off in the first pla–”

Monotora: “ *Will you all give it a rest already* ?!”

Monotora’s rough growl sent shivers down the group’s spines.

Monotora: “It didn’t matter! It didn’t damn matter until a murder! You all could’a blown up for all I care!”

Natsuki: “H-Huh…?”

Monotora: “That’s it! Y’know what? You’ve all really pissed me off with these *useless* questions! I’m cuttin’ down your investigation time, seein’ as you really don’t care about the murder as much as the bombs!”

Brian: “No…! I *do* care!”

Kurumada: “Now ya just actin’ childish for no reason!”

Monotora: “ *Too bad* ! You can all go *die* then!”

Heavy stomps resounded out as Monotora stormed out of the storage room. Silence lingered for as long as everyone's hearts were beating rapidly in their chests.

Brian: "...You guys care, don't you?"

Hayasaka's focus had been snapped to Brian's quiet words.

Hayasaka: "O…Of course."

Latte: "We care as much as you do, dear."

Jesse: "Yeah, but… How are we even meant to do this? Y'know, all the trial stuff. One of the smartest is… gone."

Brian: "We'll just have to do it ourselves. It's L, right? Even if he's the one that died, he's bound to have left some clues of his own behind."

Jesse: "No, man. I said 'one of'."

Jesse gestured to Hayasaka.

Hayasaka: "Ah, well I'm not–you know, B-Brian is also…"

Kurumada: "You better not be insistin' the responsibility for all this shit gets shoved onto Hayasaka."

Jesse: "That wasn't what I meant, yo!"

Hayasaka: " *Please* ! Just… We need to stop comparing each other in terms of competence anymore. The only reason I've been able to get so far is by the aid I've received by you all around me."

Brian: "Hayasaka…"

Saiki: " *We never should have relied on L, anyway. He was always so annoying with his clarity on things* ."

Latte: "I couldn't agree more with Hayasaka. With so many bright and wonderful people here, we should all work together, not compete to let the deemed 'best' handle it all."

Natsuki: "Nn… Damnit! You really are right, aren't you? Fine! I'm gonna work super hard to investigate this time, even if I have been skipping out of the investigations in the previous two cases!"

Jesse: "Man, I just realised I've never actually investigated myself. I've always just been helpin' out someone with their loss, or, uh, the other way round. But this time, I'm gonna put in my damn all!"

Brian: "Ah, everyone…! Thank you so much."

Kurumada: "Hey, we don't need no thanks. We just gotta do what we can with what we got left."

Natsuki: "Still, as much as I wanna help, I don't know where I'm supposed to start. The storage room is really cramped with all these shelves in the way."

Hayasaka: "Anywhere and everywhere that deems itself suspicious, I suppose."

Jesse: "Do we need someone to guard L's body?"

Saiki: " *The room's small, so we'd be able to catch anyone doing anything suspicious to L's body anyway* ."

Latte: “Good luck everyone! Let’s focus really hard for L!”

Resolve strengthened, the group split up around the room. Turning to Brian, Hayasaka saw he was looking over L’s body again.

Hayasaka: “Brian… Would you like to investigate together again?”

Brian: “Oh, um… I’m really thankful for the offer, but, is it alright if I do this on my own this time?”

Hayasaka: “Why’s that?”

Brian: “I just… Want to prove to myself that I can do it just like you and L can. I’d like to use what I learned from L to search around as much as possible in the shorter time we have."

Hayasaka: “I see.” (“I feel a strange affirmation in his words. It’s most likely from that…”)

FLASHBACK

Brian: “Hey… Do you guys think I’m stupid?”

FLASHBACK

L: “I’m certain you have a lot of potential. You simply need to be more confident in yourself. Just as Hayasaka has.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“Brian didn’t see how L was acting at the restaurant. But, I feel like even if he did, he would still feel this way.”)

As Hayasaka glanced down, he remembered Brian’s situation with his plastic aid.

Hayasaka: “Ah, wait, but will you be alright to walk around?”

Brian: “I’m sure I can manage on my own around this room. I feel like I don’t really need this crutch all that much. If anything, it just feels like an insult…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, well, good luck then.”

But as Hayasaka turned around, he noticed someone else was standing by his side.

Kurumada: “Heh, so if you *are* finally free, how about you n’ me join forces again?”

Hayasaka: “Hm, I suppose it has been a while, hasn’t it? Then, I wouldn’t mind that at all.”

He gave the other a small smile. However, it faltered.

Kurumada: “You alright?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, it’s just… The others were right: I’ve gotten so used to the idea of having L around to save the day when we’re in a stump, so I’m nervous about doing this alone.”

Kurumada: “Hey, it’s like you said before: you’ve never been alone doin’ this. You got everyone else. You got me. And I know better than anyone else that you won’t back down so easily now.”

Hayasaka: “Haha… I suppose you’re right. And, we really shouldn’t be wasting time talking like this.” (“Not to mention… I’m still concerned why I have such a strange feeling that I should know something about the storage room already. For now, I'll just have to leave it be.")

INVESTIGATION

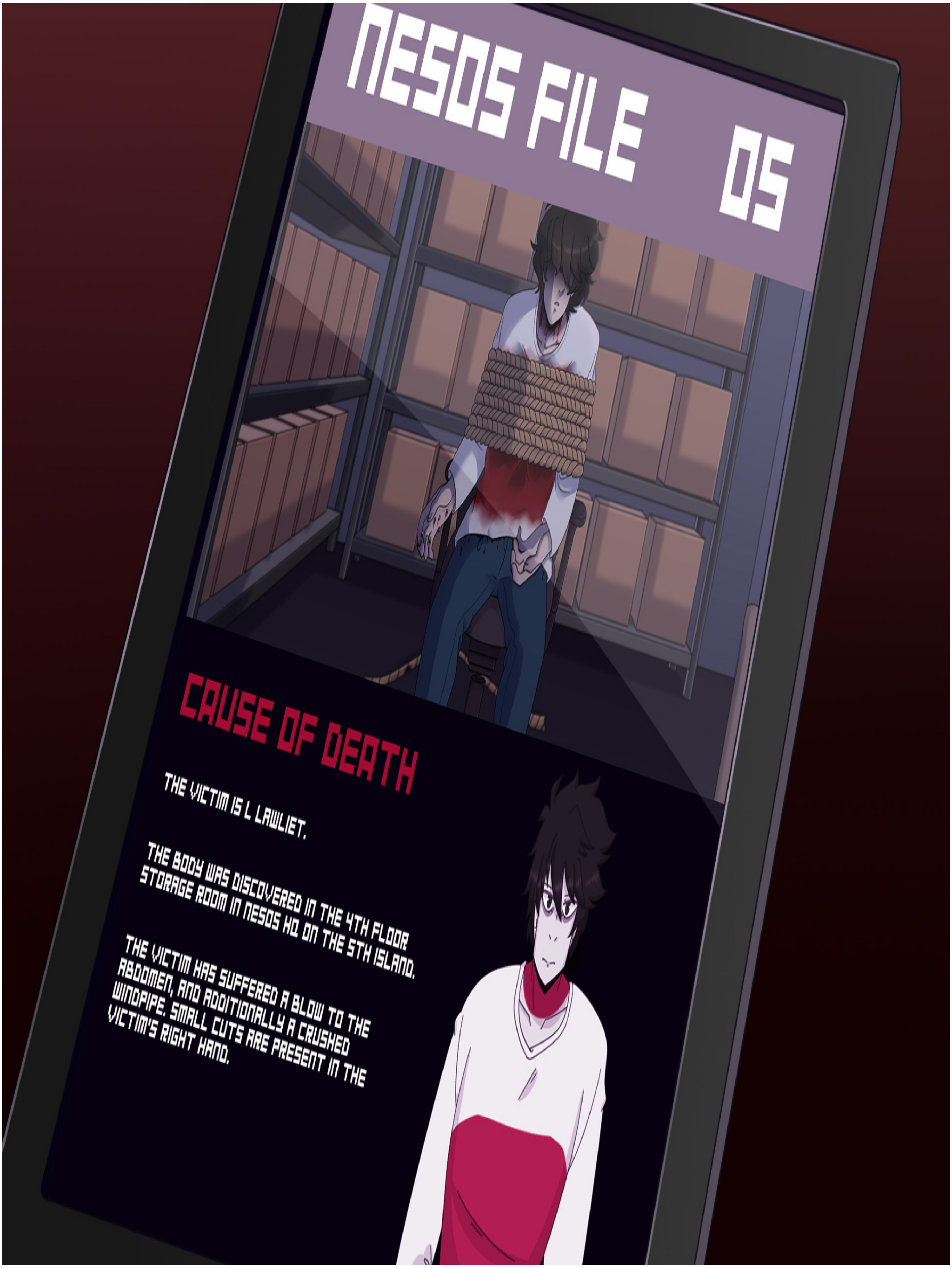
Kurumada: "First step: the file."

Hayasaka: "Perhaps we should go ahead and read it at the end just to spice things up, haha…"

Kurumada: "What the? Who the hell is Lawliet?"

Hayasaka: "Huh?"

Hayasaka looked over to see Kurumada was reading something on his tablet, presumably the file. Noticing the other peer closer, Kurumada tilted his screen so he could see.



NESOS FILE 05

CAUSE OF DEATH

THE VICTIM IS L LAWLIET.

THE BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN THE 4TH FLOOR STORAGE ROOM IN NESOS HQ ON THE 5TH ISLAND.

THE VICTIM HAS SUFFERED A BLOW TO THE ABDOMEN, AND ADDITIONALLY A CRUSHED WINDPIPE. SMALL CUTS ARE PRESENT IN THE VICTIM'S RIGHT HAND.

The Victim is L Lawliet. The body was discovered in the 4th floor storage room in Nesos HQ on the 5th island. The victim has suffered a blow to the abdomen, and additionally a crushed windpipe. Small cuts are present in the victim's right hand.

Hayasaka: “That’s… strange. Why has there been a full name listed for L? As far as I can remember, L never told us his last name. And, even what he *did* call of himself was simply a detective nickname…”

FLASHBACK

???: “L, the Ultimate Criminal Investigator.”

Hayasaka: “Investigator, huh…?”

L: “I’m one of the world’s best, in fact. No meaning to boast, however.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? Well if you’re so good, then why haven’t we heard of ya?”

Hayasaka: “Maybe it’s smarter that his identity is kept secret, being a detective and all. In fact, I don’t believe L is his real name either. No offence, haha…”

L: “You’re a bright one. That’s somewhat refreshing to see…”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “So, seeing it here in this official file is… odd.”

Kurumada: “Maybe Nesos just don’t know his real name either?”

Hayasaka: “But if that was the case, then how come they have a last name for him?”

Kurumada: “Eh, we shouldn’t get so sidetracked on the mystery of his name. Let’s just focus on the mystery of his murder.”

Hayasaka: “Right…” (“Although, looking at the rest of the file, it’s nothing special. Bare information, and a lack of time again. It’s like Nesos doesn’t even want us to know anything, stubbornly writing out the obvious just to please the formula. The crushed windpipe, however, appears concerning. I think I may keep it in mind when we check the body.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Nesos File #5

As Kurumada put his tablet away, Hayasaka couldn’t help but turn his attention back to L’s body. If it wasn’t for Kurumada humming frustratedly beside him, he wasn’t sure how long he was going to get caught up in staring.

Kurumada: “With L gone, you’re the only medical expert we got left in terms of corpse searchin’.”

It was clear he had mumbled that more to himself rather than to Hayasaka. Regardless, Hayasaka shook his head.

Hayasaka: “...It’s fine.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, let’s just do a quick run-down of his wounds. We’ll ‘prolly get the same results if we– *wait what* ? What do ya mean it’s fine?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t mind being the one to examine his body, if that’s the only choice we have. Doing a bare check around won’t do us any good, anyway.”

Kurumada: “But you don’t–... Are you sure? One-hundred percent?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t understand your apprehensiveness, Kurumada. I’ve done this in every case before, haven’t I? You didn't even seem to mind as much in the previous investigation.”

Kurumada: “That was different. Bojack hardly had any wounds on him. But L? Just look at him, Hayasaka. And you’ll be the only one lookin’ close this time? It's not like I want you goin’ down this route exposing yourself to all these corpses, y’know? It just ain’t healthy. It just ain’t normal.”

Hayasaka: (“Oh… When he words it that way, I understand what he means. Perhaps what I said was a bit strange.”) “I know, but, what can we do?”

He gave a smile to the other, although it felt a bit tired.

Hayasaka: “If I don’t do this, how can I be sure we’re prepared to help everyone?”

Kurumada looked at him, before sighing and giving him a soft pat on the shoulder.

Kurumada: “Haha, I really will be callin’ ya the Ultimate Doctor or something if you keep this up.”

Preparing themselves, the two walked back over to L. Brian was beside him, already trying to look around, while Latte stood a little ways behind.

Kurumada: “Huh. I wouldn’t think you would be on corpse duty, Latte.”

Latte: “Don’t mind me, I just want to support Brian. I can see through his words how assured he has become, and I want to see what sort of inspiring things he does next!”

Brian: “Haah, now I kinda wish I had a teacher like you back at school…”

Kurumada: “So, what to look at first?”

Brian: “I say we do an initial look around before diving deeper into any wounds.”

Latte: “Why’s that?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I believe it’s from that rope tied around L’s abdomen wound.”

Brian: “Yep. It’s probably best not to tamper with his body yet, just in case we miss something, right?”

Kurumada: “Speakin’ of rope, why is L even tied up in the first place?”

Latte: “Hm, what if he was tied up to be questioned about the bombs’ locations?”

Kurumada: “That would be ironic. After all, L was waitin’ for someone *he* could question about bein’ a traitor.”

Hayasaka: “It looks like… the rope is relatively clean, with only a bit of blood on it.” (“I wonder… Who was the one to tie up L? Could it have been possible? Why would they even need to? L seemed to entertain any discussion without fault.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Rope Around L

Kurumada: “Are we ready to untie him now?”

Brian: “Wait just a bit… Hum…”

Brian went to lift up L’s right hand, where Hayasaka saw thin glass shards pierced into his palm and the inside of his fingers.

Latte: “Ough, that doesn’t look very pleasant, does it…?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, ‘cuz those blows to his abdomen n’ neck were nothin’.”

Brian: “I wonder where this glass came from. I can’t see anything around here made out of glass…”

Hayasaka: “We might have to check around the storage room for any items made out of such thin glass.”

Truth bullet obtained: Glass Shards in L’s Hand

Kurumada: “So how about it? Can L be untied now?”

Brian: “I still feel like something is wrong, though.”

Kurumada: “Then what the hell is it now?”

Hayasaka: “G-Give Brian a moment, alright? What can you see, Brian?”

Brian: “Um…”

Brian stared hard at L. As the others waited in anticipation, anxiety grew on his face.

Brian: “...Ah, I know! It’s his sitting position.”

Latte: “Sitting position? Is there something wrong with it?”

Brian: “Whenever L usually sits, he has his knees up to his chest. So, it’s weird he’s sat like this, huh?”

Kurumada: “And why’s that important?”

Brian: “L told me that if he didn’t, his reasoning ability would deplete by 40%.”

Hayasaka: (“I… have a feeling that’s not the true reason. But, I’ll accept it for what it is.”)

Truth bullet obtained: L’s Sitting Position

Brian: “I… Think that’s everything. So, L can be untied now.”

Kurumada: “Here, lemme do it. Don’t want you guys touchin’ nothing weird.”

Brian: “But, I already touched his hand?”

Kurumada: “Well that’s your own fault, ain’t it?”

Brian: “I-I never said it was a bad thing…?”

Regardless, Kurumada went to untie L, placing the rope aside. However, with L’s abdomen wound now revealed, Hayasaka could only gawk uncomfortably at the once white shirt turned deep red. He’d hate to imagine what it would’ve felt like on himself.

Brian: “I guess we should lift L’s shirt up to get a better look at the wound. But, um…”

Brian paused, looking aside with a slightly flushed face.

Kurumada: “Hey, it’s not like ya gonna be strippin’ him down or nothing.”

Brian: “I-I just feel bad doing it now that he’s dead…!”

Latte: “Tsk, tsk. You two shouldn’t be acting so childish over something like this. Here, I’ll do it myself.”

Hayasaka: (“I’m rather thankful she took on the assertion here…”)

Stepping in front of L, Latte took the hem of his shirt and pulled it up, carefully tucking it around into the neck hole to make it stay in place.

Brian: “T-Thanks, Latte… Hayasaka, uh, do you want to take a look first? You might know a bit more than me with this.”

Hayasaka nodded, leaning in closer. A deep purple and brown bruise painted most of L’s abdomen, sticking out like a sore thumb against his pale skin.

Hayasaka: “Mm… It appears it’s done quite the damage to his internal organs in this state.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah? D’ya think it would’a done enough to hit anything vital?”

Hayasaka: “I’m… unsure.”

Brian: “What if you took a look at L’s back, too? There might be something there that helps you determine it.”

Hayasaka: “Uhm… Would that be possible? With him sitting in the chair like that and all.”

Kurumada: “I could tilt him forward a bit. If, uh, everyone’s alright with that.”

Brian: “Yeah, that should be okay.”

With that, Kurumada grabbed L's shoulders, pulling him forward just enough for Hayasaka to lean over and take a scan at his exposed back.

Latte: "Can you see anything new?"

Hayasaka: "I feel… I feel like the bruise is much darker on his back in comparison to his front."

Nodding towards Kurumada, Hayasaka let him know it was alright to place L back to his original position.

Kurumada: "One hell of a bruise, though. Wonder what did him in."

Brian: "It'd have to be something pretty large to leave a bruise like that."

Hayasaka: "Then, we'll just have to look for a weapon that matches such a criteria."

Brian: "So… Do you think it was fatal, Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka: "W-Well… I don't think it is. But, is that right…?"

Kurumada: "Hey, don't stress yourself about it. If it was that easy, it would'a just been stated in the Nesos file."

Latte: "I agree. You don't need all the answers to fill L's shoes."

Hayasaka: "T-That wasn't what I meant…" ("No, she's probably right though. My nerves are just… making me doubt myself.")

Truth bullet obtained: L's Abdomen Wound

Brian: “It’s best we cover him up again if we’re done here…”

Brian then pulled L’s shirt back down.

Latte: “Are we going to look at his neck wound next?”

Brian: “It seems like the last injury we haven’t looked at yet.”

Hayasaka: “...”

‘The victim has suffered a blow to the abdomen, and additionally a crushed windpipe.’

Just then, Hayasaka felt his heart begin to race. It was as if he wanted to say something, but he didn’t know what. Ignoring it, he went to join Brian studying around L’s neck.

Brian: “The bruising almost looks as deep as his abdomen wound, huh?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, I see what you mean…”

Kurumada: “See any nail marks?”

Brian: “Huh? Nail marks?”

Kurumada: “Yeah. When we were lookin’ over a similar brusin’ on Walter’s corpse, we found no nail marks. It led us to conclude that it wasn’t strangulation by hand during the trial, remember?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I’m impressed you remembered something like that from so long ago, Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “Hey, I’m just tryn’a make a helpful connection. Anything to cut down stuff we’ve already seen, eh?”

At the advice, Hayasaka trailed around L’s neck to check for any nail marks.

Hayasaka: “Well, I don’t see any.”

Latte: “So then, if L wasn’t strangled by hand, there must be another cause.”

Brian: “It’d have to be something strong enough to crush his windpipe, too, like the Nesos file said.”

Kurumada: “I sure hope the file ain’t lyin’ about that part, then.”

There it was again. That growing anxiety over the topic of the windpipe. Hayasaka had to wonder if he was going to pass out at how fast his heart was beating.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka, everythin’ alright? You’re looking a little pa–”

Hayasaka: “I-I want to touch his neck.”

Brian: “Huh? Could, uh, could you say that again?”

Hayasaka: “I want… I want to touch L’s neck to get a better feel for the wound.”

The three paused, confusion plastered across their faces as they looked at him.

Latte: “Has… anyone touched any of the bodies like that before?”

Brian: “I know L has. I’ve seen him touch some of the bodies sometimes…”

Kurumada: “But for Hayasaka to do it is different!”

Hayasaka: “I-I just want to make sure we don’t overlook anything…! Like you said, Kurumada, if the file is lying, then…”

Kurumada: “I was just making a passing comment! You shouldn’t take it too seriously.”

Hayasaka: “No, despite that, I… feel compelled to do it, for you all, and everyone else.”

Brian: “...You’re very brave for wanting to do this, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…” (“That sounds rather familiar, doesn’t it?”)

Kurumada: “Are you sayin’ you think it’s okay for Hayasaka to go and touch a corpse?”

Latte: “I know how worried you may feel, Kurumada, but this is Hayasaka’s decision. If he feels this is something important, shouldn’t we give him a chance?”

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry, Kurumada. I know this completely goes against what you said earlier, about it not being right to go down this path. Yet, I just…”

Kurumada: “...Nah. I’m just bein’ stubborn, ain’t I? I got nothin’ to worry about, because I trust that you’ll take things slow.”

Hayasaka: “I see. Thank you.” (“I do know why he’s acting like this. Mai’s death, my… attempt on my own life. He’s just scared to see someone he cares for get hurt again. Of course, I won’t… be so careless.”)

It took a few deep breaths to calm himself down before Hayasaka pressed his hands gently against L's neck. An icy shiver ran down his spine as he felt the cold skin prick back at him. Swallowing back his nerves, he moved his hands around. L's flesh was taut and abused, dried blood making harsh, bumpy textures against Hayasaka's fingers.

Curious, he decided to squeeze his fingers down on the skin just a little harder. He couldn't feel much before, so this should help to find–

Hayasaka froze.

Something poked back between his fingers.

Hayasaka: "A-AAH–!"

His entire body snapped away, tumbling backwards and almost tripping over his own feet.

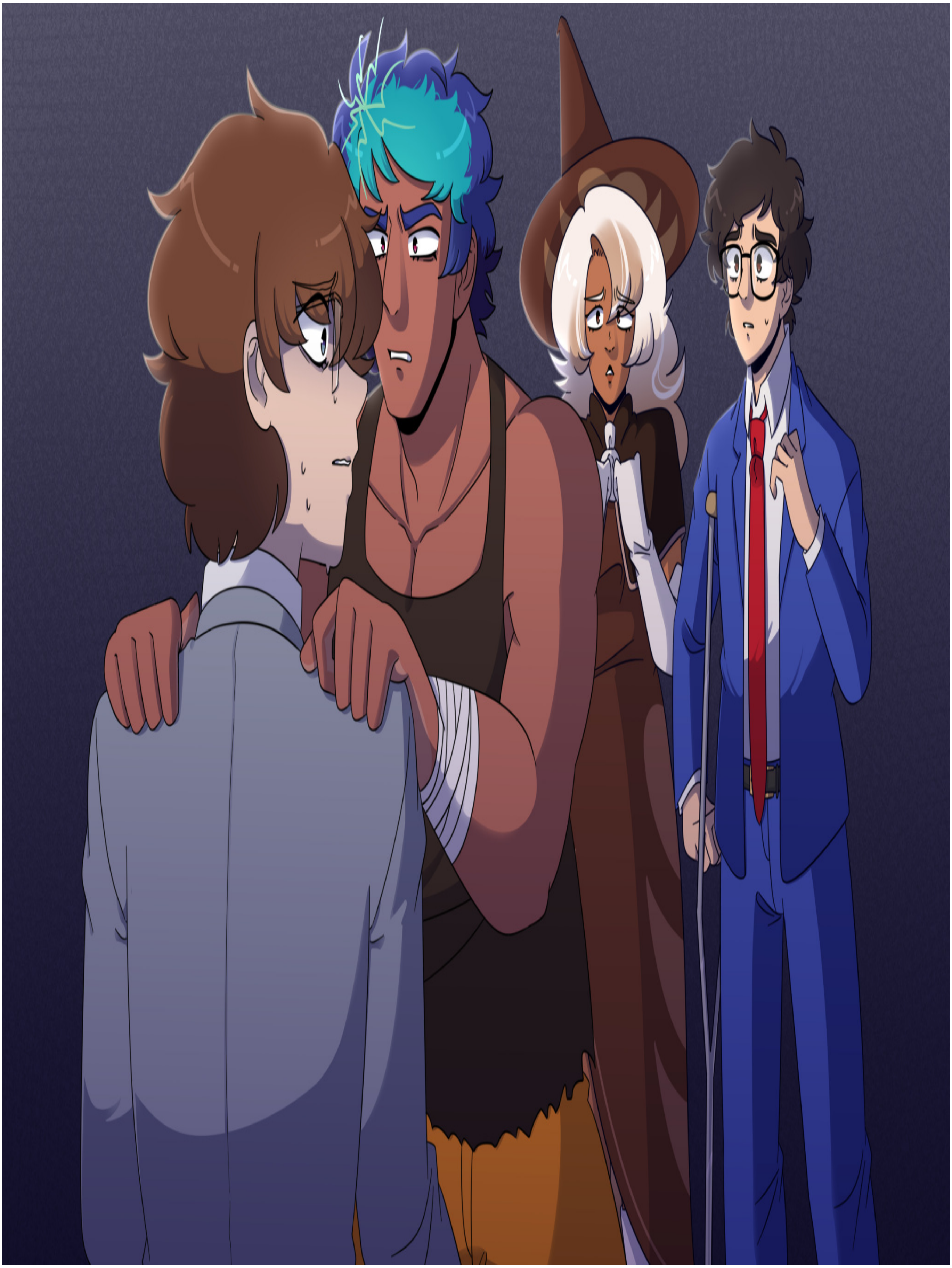
Kurumada: "Hayasaka!"

Before he could fall over, Kurumada firmly gripped his shoulders.

Kurumada: "What happened?! Are you alright?!"

But Hayasaka could only stare at the floor.

He could still vividly recall the clear break in the windpipe. The broken cartilage between his fingers. As if he had just snapped it himself.



Hayasaka: “*... L’s windpipe… I-It’s definitely… crushed …*”

Kurumada: “Wha? How do you… *Oh. Oh jesus fucking christ* .”

Hayasaka felt Kurumada’s grip tighten only out of pure disgust. He noticed Latte covered her mouth, too horrified to speak. Brian could only wince.

Brian: “Hayasaka… I-I’m so sorry.”

Hayasaka: “N-No… It’s my own fault I–”

Kurumada: “No! That’s it! We’re done with L’s body now!”

Hayasaka: “Huh? W-Wait, but I’m not finished yet–”

Kurumada: “What do you mean *not finished*?”

The sickened and dreading words echoed in Hayasaka’s ears. Forcing himself to peer up at the other, he saw Kurumada’s eyes were wide, mouth ajar – completely at a loss.

Kurumada: “Why do you think you’re not done…?”

Hayasaka blinked a few times. That was a good question. A very reasonable question, in fact. A question he should’ve asked himself, but didn’t. As he dwelled on it more, a heat rose to his chest, one blanketed in pure disgust and embarrassment.

Hayasaka: “I… I-I’m sorry. I don’t–I don’t know why on earth I was thinking like that…”

Kurumada: “Gh… I’m not mad at you. Just, please, I don’t want to see you do that again.”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t believe there was much else to be found, anyway.”

Latte: “Please, Hayasaka, take a break, dear. You’re pushing yourself too hard.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, thank you for the offer, but I can’t stop now. We’ve hardly even begun.”

Brian: “Would L think to tell you that?”

Hayasaka looked toward Brian. Then, he glanced at L.

Hayasaka: “...I suppose not.”

Kurumada: “Eh? L would definitely say some shit like that.”

Brian: “No, L was more compassionate than that. He knew not to push people to their limits.”

Hayasaka: “Either way, I… While I can’t muster myself to sit around, I’ll take it easy for the time being.”

The others nodded at him.

Hayasaka: (“I can’t believe that was really me a few minutes ago. I just… thought what I was doing was fine. Why? I don’t know. Isn’t it what I’ve always done? I’m just looking at the body. Was it too far? Why did I keep insisting on? Did I really think that was normal? Haha… What’s wrong with me all of a sudden? No, I’m just going to… let it pass. That being said, I will never forget L’s neck wound, at least.”)

Truth bullet obtained: L’s Neck Wound

Brian: “Thankfully, that was the last thing we needed to check of L’s body…”

Latte: “Then, let’s– *oof*!”

Brian: “Huh?”

Latte: “Whoops, I think I just stepped on something…”

Crouching down to pick the item up, Latte held up a mid-length piece of rope, not connected to the rope that was used to tie L to the chair.

Latte: “Hm, that’s odd. It was just lying behind the chair…”

Kurumada: “So what? Is it just extra rope or somethin’?”

Latte: “Hang on. There’s a small scuff in the middle here…”

Brian: “A scuff? Can I take a closer look at that rope, Latte?”

Latte: “Sure thing, dear.”

Brian: “Hum… What do you make of this, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “It appears… It would have to have been worked away at to be torn like this.”

Brian: “Do you mean rubbed in some way?”

Latte: “And do you think it has something to do with L’s case?”

Kurumada: “To me, it kinda looks like excess rope the killer didn’t need after tyin’ L up.”

Hayasaka: “It really could be just that. But, it still doesn’t account for the fray…” (“That was, unless the rope was like this originally.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Scuffed Rope

Brian placed the rope beside the other length.

Brian: “What’s next, I wonder…”

Kurumada: “Hey, what the hell’s this?”

Hayasaka turned to see Kurumada a few metres off, staring down at a sledgehammer. Curious, he went to pick it up.

Latte: “Kurumada! Don’t just pick up weapons like that so casually! It’s just as crass as the time you tried to step in that large pool of blood in the VR world!”

Kurumada: “No it ain’t! I was just wonderin’ what it was even doing here! I didn’t think there would be a weapon like this in the storage room.”

Hayasaka: “Although, with the blood stain on the head of the sledgehammer, it does look like it was used to attack L somehow. But, which wound did it cause? Or, did it cause both…?”

Brian: “...Hey, can I try lifting that sledgehammer?”

Hayasaka: “Huh?”

Kurumada: “Oh, so you wanna give it a whirl, eh?”

Brian: “Erm, n-no. I just want to test something.”

Dropping the sledgehammer down with a slam, Kurumada stepped aside to allow Brian to approach the weapon as Hayasaka held onto his crutch. Wrapping both hands around the handle, Brian, with a waver, managed to lift it off from the ground.

Brian: “ *Phew* . Hm…”

Brian went to swing the sledgehammer around in a circular motion.

Hayasaka: “Uh, Brian, what’re you doing?”

Brian: “Oh, don’t worry. I think I’m sure now that anyone would be capable of lifting and swinging the sledgehammer if I can.”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t tell if that’s an insult on Brian’s own strength or not…”)

Kurumada: “Oh. You were doin’ that so suspicion wouldn’t just fall on my capabilities, huh?”

Brian: “Well, technically if I couldn’t lift it, then you would be the only choice otherwise.”

Kurumada: “Oi! That’s just tryn’a suspect people before the trial’s even begun!”

Brian: “I-I’m not!”

Hayasaka: (“It’s somewhat nice to see the two look out for each other, however…”)

Latte: “Oh, but what about Natsuki? Would she be able to lift it? She is the smallest out of us, ah, but I’m not necessarily saying I wish to suspect her of anything…”

Hayasaka: “No, you’re just trying to be cautious. It’s understandable, haha…”

Brian: “We could ask her to try and lift it later on, before the investigation ends.”

Hayasaka: (“More importantly, I’m just glad to see a weapon on location this time around. However, that doesn’t necessarily calm my nerves. Such a weapon like that… It wasn’t something I was expecting.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Sledgehammer

Kurumada: “Doesn’t seem to be anything else around L. Not what I can see, anyway.”

Hayasaka: (“It’s such a morbid death. It’s like the different wounds on Walter, but harsher. It’s like the multiple wounds on Retsuko, but deeper. It’s like the ruthlessness of Ena’s and Yuri’s deaths, but somehow darker. Yet, it also holds a vulnerable sight like Bojack’s, but more confusing. Could someone really be capable of doing all of this to L? And, why?”)

Brian: “Oh! Ah, Hayasaka, there was something I was meaning to ask you earlier, but I kinda forgot about it until now.”

Hayasaka: “What is it?”

Brian: “I want to know more about the bomb search everyone conducted yesterday. I didn’t hear much about it other than the vague explanation you told me last night.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, unfortunately, I really only know as much as you, other than just who searched what island.”

Brian: “Oh, I see. So, where *did* you guys search?”

Kurumada: “I pretty much turned all the second island’s facilities inside out at least three or so times, but I came up empty handed. Really pissed me off ‘cuz I was looking real harder than I usually do for stuff.”

Latte: “Ah, I had no luck, either. On the third island, I made sure to check places we were most likely to visit such as the woodworking shop and shrine. But, I didn’t find anything.”

Brian: “Hm, then I wonder if any of the others found anything suspicious. But… I still want to double check L for anything else, just in case.”

Kurumada: “I hope you ain’t gonna try goin’ touchy-feely on L now.”

Brian: “N-No!? E-Especially not after what Hayasaka experienced…!”

Hayasaka: (“Haah… No, I’m sure Brian just wants to spend a bit more time with L. I can understand that, after all…”)

FLASHBACK

Brian: “...Hey, L. Thank you. You really are a good friend.”

L: “Friend…?”

Hayasaka watched as L turned his head away.

L: “...Yes. Friends.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("...This situation's so horrible, isn't it?")

Latte: "I'll stay right here with you in that case, Brian."

Hayasaka: "Ah, why don't Kurumada and I go and ask the others for their accounts about the bomb search as we investigate around? Then, we can come back and report to you once we're done."

Brian: "Yeah, that's a good idea. Thanks, Hayasaka."

Hayasaka: "It's no problem, really. Kurumada, should we start by the storage shelves?"

Kurumada: "Already gettin' to it? Sure, there might be some suspicion stuff on some we didn't think to look over, considerin' the appearance of that sledgehammer."

Following a brief goodbye to Brian and Latte, Hayasaka and Kurumada moved to check out some of the shelves. Something caught Hayasaka's eye, and he realised it was that one of the shelves had been tilted back against the wall. He gestured for Kurumada to follow him over so they could inspect it. Just like he thought, the shelf was lying at an angle against the wall, its boxes barely sitting properly and most having slid backwards towards the wall.

Hayasaka: "Was this shelf like this before?"

Kurumada: "Dunno, but check this out. There's a damn large crack in the wall behind the shelf."

Hayasaka: "Huh? Surely not… I mean, if the shelf was knocked back, it wouldn't have caused enough of an impact to create such a massive crack, would it?"

Kurumada went to knock on the wall.

Kurumada: "Ain't no weak-ass drywall, this. It's 'prolly made outta brick n' cement. So, you do got a point there."

Hayasaka: (“Even so, why is it knocked back in the first place? This one may be a bit of a strange mystery to add to the mix.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Knocked Over Storage Shelf

As Hayasaka peeked through the shelf on his left, he noticed Natsuki and Jesse on the other side huddled around something. He felt Kurumada peer over his shoulder to take a gander at the scene.

Kurumada: “They must’a found something worthwhile. Let’s say we go pay ‘em a visit.”

Walking around the shelf to get to the duo, they found Natsuki bent down over an object while Jesse stood closely over her.

Jesse: “Oh, yo, Kurusaka. How’s everything going?”

Hayasaka: “ *Kurusaka* …?”

Jesse: “Y’know, kuru-saka. It’s a mashup of both of your names. Then again, maybe haya-mada sounds kinda better…”

Kurumada: “Now ain’t the time for ridiculous nicknames like that! Oi, Natsuki, what’d you find down there?”

Natsuki: “There’s a broken flashlight down here on the floor, *Kurusaka* .”

Kurumada: “I swear to god…”

Natsuki: “Then don’t talk to me like that, dummy.”

Jesse: “Still, it’s kinda weird, right? There’s a box full of flashlights just here on the shelf above.”

Hayasaka: “If that’s the case, then this one down here couldn’t have gone far.”

Jesse: “D’ya think it fell outta the box or somethin’?”

Natsuki: “That wasn’t what he meant, you know…?”

Hayasaka: “So why did you decide to get a better look from the floor, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “I wanted to see if anything was wrong with it.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, now that you mention it, I can see the glass has been smashed. Be careful with all those small shards scattered around…”

Natsuki: “Don’t worry, I’ve been avoiding them. Also, I don’t know if this is important, but this flashlight’s switch has been set to ‘on’.”

Jesse: “Oh, yo, so when the flashlight fell out from the box, the switch got changed when it hit the ground.”

Kurumada: “Pack it in with ya damn theory, will ya?”

Hayasaka: (“If a flashlight was used, I wonder why. The lights seem to be working fine right now. I might want to go and check the lightswitch later, considering the last case and all.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Broken Flashlight

Jesse: “‘Course, that isn’t everything we found.”

Hayasaka: “What do you mean?”

Natsuki stood up, bushing down her skirt.

Natsuki: “We found some weapons, too.”

Kurumada: “ *Weapons* ?”

On that note, Jesse slid over to the shelf and pulled out one of the boxes. Hayasaka peered in, only to flinch back at the sight of multiple firearms lying inside.

Hayasaka: “Ah dear… I-I hope they’re not loaded, h-haha…”

Jesse: “Are guns common in Japan?”

Kurumada: “Only really the police n’ military use ‘em. Banned for the rest of us.”

Natsuki: “ *Huff* , it’s stupid for everyone to have access to a gun anyway.”

Jesse: “Hey, my right to bear arms is totally worth it for self-defence!”

Hayasaka: (“You know, something tells me I’m best staying out of gun politics…”) “Well, it’s highly unlikely a gun was used in this case. L didn’t have any gunshot wounds on his body when we checked him a little earlier.”

Jesse: “Eh, you never know. Maybe someone else could’a got shot instead.”

Natsuki: “Why’re you so insistent on the guns being used?”

Hayasaka: “...It looks like the guns are all of different models, but I'm a bit unsure on what’s what.”

Jesse: “Oh, I know a ton of them. Here, this one’s a m16. You got a g19 over here. Some rugers, and a dart gun…”

Kurumada: “And here I thought you were gonna start spoutin’ out basic stuff like ‘pistol’ and ‘revolver’.”

Jesse: “Hey, I learned a lot’a this stuff from video games, anyway.”

Hayasaka: (“Although I wasn’t expecting to get ‘educated’ on firearm types today, I suppose I could keep it in mind. Even if I feel it’s not all that necessary…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Box of Firearms

Kurumada: “So, did’ya happen to come across any more… blunt weapons? Ya know, like the sledgehammer we found beside L.”

Jesse: “Yo, no fucking way, man! I knew we’d eventually get access to a sledgehammer! It’s just like I said in the second trial.”

FLASHBACK

Latte: “But if all this is true, I have to ask why the killer chose to use a microphone to kill Retsuko.”

Jesse: “Yeah, wouldn’t it be easier to use somethin’ like, I dunno, a sledgehammer?”

Brian: “But, um, we don’t have access to a sledgehammer?”

FLASHBACK END

Natsuki: “Eh? Wait, you were *actually* being serious back then?”

Jesse: “Hahaha, nah, I wasn’t. But, hey, funny coincidence, right? …Uh, now that I’m thinkin’ about it, it’s not really all that funny in this situation, is it? Sorry.”

Hayasaka: “It’s alright…”

Jesse: “Anyway, to answer your question, we haven’t found any blunt weapons like that.”

Natsuki: “It’s not like something as big as a sledgehammer could fit into one of the boxes, though.”

Jesse: “We could check around a few of the boxes if you want?”

Kurumada: “Might as well.”

Jesse and Kurumada then started to search around the boxes on the shelf.

Hayasaka: “Ah, Natsuki, that reminds me. Do you think you can come and try lifting the sledgehammer later? Brian was trying it earlier, but we didn’t know if you would be able to.”

Natsuki: “Huh? Hm, I guess I can, if it’s for the investigation.”

Jesse: “Oh shit?”

Hayasaka and the others turned to see Jesse holding a swiss army knife multitool.

Jesse: “The hell’s this doin’ in a box full of pliers?”

Kurumada: “Eh?”

Hayasaka: “Are there any other multitools in that box, Jesse?”

Jesse rummaged through the box, but shook his head.

Jesse: “Nope. This was the only one in there. Kinda made sense though, ‘cuz it was just lying on top of everything else.”

Natsuki: “Then, is there a box of multitools somewhere else?”

Kurumada: “Oh, yeah. Here, it’s just a few boxes over.”

Hayasaka: “That’s strange. Why is it not in its proper box?”

Jesse: “Hell if I know. Now I’m unsure whether I should toss this in its correct box or dump it back with the pliers to preserve the crime scene.”

Kurumada: “Does it matter either way? Ya got four witnesses over it bein’ in the wrong box already.”

Jesse decided to throw the multitool back onto the pliers.

Jesse: “They’ll be the adopted one.”

Natsuki: “Jeeze, how dumb…”

Hayasaka: (“I might as well keep a note of it. Was this just a storage mistake on Nesos’ behalf, or something else?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Multitool

Natsuki: “Well, if you can’t find anything else, then I don’t mind lifting the sledgehammer now.”

Jesse: “Lifting it? What’s going on?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, it’s just that we want to see if Natsuki’s capable of lifting the sledgehammer or not.”

Jesse: “Yo, can I have a shot at it too?”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, we were only concerned about her, really…”

Kurumada: “Here, I’ll go grab it.”

Kurumada went to fetch the sledgehammer, the sight of the dried blood around the head making Natsuki wince.

Natsuki: “Y-You didn’t tell me it was covered in blood.”

Kurumada: “What were you expectin’ as a weapon? You only gotta touch the handle, anyway.”

Natsuki: “T-That wasn’t what I meant…”

Regardless, Kurumada stuck out the sledgehammer towards her. Once Natsuki grabbed onto the handle with both hands, he promptly let go, sending the sledgehammer – and Natsuki – down to the ground. She heaved the weapon up as much as she could, but she could barely get it to come off the ground. Throwing the sledgehammer back down, Natsuki let out an exasperated grunt.

Natsuki: “God! That’s way too heavy!”

Jesse: “Aw, you gave it a good try, Nat.”

Jesse patted Natsuki’s back with a teasing smile, and she looked back at him with daggers in her eyes.

Natsuki: “ *Shut it* .”

Jesse: “Hey, hey, it’s no biggie. C’mon, lemme have a go now.”

Jesse then went up to the sledgehammer, lifting it up with more ease than its previous holder.

Jesse: “Wanna try, Mr. Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Ah? I-I don’t really… Hrm, well, I might as well check…”

Hesitantly taking the sledgehammer from Jesse, Hayasaka could feel the weight down at the head trying to pull him to the ground. Just barely, he managed to fight to keep it up.

Kurumada: “Look at you! Maybe ya really did have some muscle after all, haha.”

Hayasaka: “N-Not really. If Brian could lift it, I assumed I had a chance, too…”

Natsuki: “Great. Now all the grown up guys are just showing off now.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I-I’m sorry.”

Hayasaka went to place the sledgehammer down, feeling his shoulders thank him for removing the strain.

Hayasaka: “If anything, if you can’t lift it, then in other words, you couldn’t have used it, either.”

Natsuki: “Oh… That’s not a bad point, actually.”

Grabbing the sledgehammer, Kurumada went to return it back.

Hayasaka: “Oh, and there’s another thing we wanted to ask you two. It’s about your bomb search yesterday. Could you tell us how it went?”

Jesse: “The bomb search? Yeah, it was a total bust. We searched the hotel, park, beach, the whole nine yards. But, we came up empty handed. And I was damn sure the hotel was the prime location where L hid the bombs, man…”

Hayasaka: “I suppose wherever L *did* hide them, it wouldn’t have been that easy, like he said himself…”

Natsuki: “Still, I was kinda hopeful we would at least find one bomb with three people searching together…”

Hayasaka: “T…Three people? But, I thought it was only you two searching together.”

Natsuki: “Oh, I guess we haven’t mentioned it yet. A while into our search last night, we bumped into Saiki.”

Kurumada: “That kid? I thought he was s’posed to be searchin’ around by himself on the fourth island.”

Jesse: “That’s what we thought too, but Saiki told us there was no dice on the fourth island, so he decided to head back to the first. Said he had become more certain about the bombs bein’ there, which got my hopes up.”

Kurumada: “But how the hell did he get to the first island without me seein’ him? He’d have to walk through the second island no matter what.”

Hayasaka: “Then, perhaps… Saiki did walk through the second island, but you were just searching inside a building at the time.”

Kurumada: “So like a coincidence, eh? Still, did you three ever split off at any time durin’ your search?”

Natsuki: “Me and Jesse were together the whole time, and we never wandered off from each other even when Saiki joined us.”

Hayasaka: “I see. Thank you for your account.” (“I wonder… Is that why Saiki woke me up on the beach this morning? Ah, no…”)

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “What’s going on…?”

Saiki: “ *I can’t answer that. All I know is that you weren’t at the restaurant at your usual time, so I used clairvoyance to see you weren’t in your room. I went to look for you, and found you asleep here* .”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("If everyone was already back at the restaurant in the morning, then anyone could've found me. Saiki was only the first one due to his clairvoyance…")

Truth bullet obtained: Natsuki's Account

Kurumada: "I'm taking it there's nothing else you guys have found over here?"

Jesse: "That's the most of what we've come across right now."

Natsuki: "Isn't it annoying, though? Everything's so tight in here with all these shelves in the way. I'm surprised a murder even happened here."

Hayasaka: "I do see what you mean. It would be convenient to have a bird's eye view of the room, wouldn't it? Haha…"

Jesse: "Hey, that's it! Why don't we make just that? We could get some pens n' paper and draw our own layout of the room."

Kurumada: "That doesn't sound half bad to me, but do we even have time to waste doin' all that?"

Natsuki: "Me and Jesse can handle it. You guys can go back to your own investigation."

Hayasaka: "Thank you for the offer. Good luck."

Jesse: "Thanks, yo. Hey, I think I saw some paper over there."

Natsuki and Jesse then jogged off to gather the needed items.

Kurumada: "Hayasaka, wanna go find Saiki next? I wanna ask about his side of the bomb search a lil' more."

Hayasaka: “I suppose we could. However, I wanted to go and check the lightswitch too.”

Kurumada: “Heh, well it looks like we’re in luck. Look.”

Kurumada had peered around a shelf, gesturing to Hayasaka to look over where he was pointing. Down the walkway, they saw Saiki standing beside the lightswitch at the entrance.

Hayasaka: “Ha, what an awfully interesting coincidence…”

The two then walked over to meet up with Saiki.

Hayasaka: “Hello, Saiki. How’s your investigation going?”

Saiki shrugged.

Saiki: “ *I’m just trying to look around for more non-obvious clues* .”

Kurumada: “Non-obvious clues?”

Saiki: “ *There’s no way things will be simple in a case involving L* .”

Hayasaka: “Then, have you perhaps found something off with the lightswitch in that case?”

Saiki gave a half nod, and pointed towards a small dent Hayasaka hadn’t noticed from where he stood. Adjusting his glasses, he leaned closer to get a better look. The dent was circular in shape, with a very tiny diameter.

Hayasaka: “You know, this dent sort of reminds me of a similar one we saw in the room we visited in the VR world, right?”

Saiki: “ *That’s what I thought, too* .”

Kurumada: “Maybe someone was tryn’a imitate that murder simulation thing?”

Saiki: “ *What a stupid idea* .”

Kurumada: “Oi! It’s not that unreasonable, is it? What other explanations have *you* got then, huh?”

Hayasaka: “There probably is another reason, but… Saiki, do the lights appear faulty to you in any way?”

Saiki didn’t reply, as a sign he didn’t know. However, he turned back to the lightswitch and stuck his hand out towards it, as if he was going to test it to find out for himself.

Kurumada: “Hey, wait! Don’t you go n’ turn out the lights or something!”

But his warning was too late, as the lights all switched off in an instant, sending the room into complete darkness. Hayasaka could only see pure black in front of him, eyes hardly adjusted to the sudden absence of light. And then, as he should’ve expected, a few screams and shouts rang out around the room.

???: “AaAh?!”

???: “Who turned out the lights?!”

???: “I can’t seeeee!”

Hayasaka took matters into his own hands, scrambling to switch the lights back on.

Hayasaka: “S-Sorry, everyone! I was being a bit careless, haha…”

He had shouted out in the hopes his voice would be picked up by the rest of the group.

Kurumada: “No you weren’t? It was Saiki who touched the damn lights in the first place!”

Hayasaka: “ *I was trying to take the blame for him, you know* …”

Saiki: “ *This is just hard to watch. Anyway, it wasn’t even my fault. I barely even touched the switch* .”

Hayasaka: “You did? Then, I suppose the lights are very easy to turn on and off, even with the slightest touch.”

Kurumada: “So could that dent have been someone’s nail as they went to turn on the lights to the room when we came inside earlier?”

Saiki: “ *The lightswitch is sensitive, not malleable* .”

Hayasaka: (“Was that dent always there to begin with? And if not, why? However, it doesn’t appear as if the lights have been damaged in any way. In fact, they seem to be working just fine. Then, I can’t see much of a correlation as to why a flashlight would need to be used…”)

Truth bullet obtained: Dent on Lightswitch

Hayasaka then felt Kurumada gently nudge him, gesturing towards Saiki.

Kurumada: “ *Hey, now that we’re here, why don’t ya ask Saiki about the bomb search* ?”

Hayasaka: “ *Why do you want me to do it* ?”

Kurumada: “ *Saiki likes ya more. You’d get a better answer ‘outta him* .”

Saiki: “ *I can clearly hear what you’re both saying* .”

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, sorry. Um, we were just wondering about your account of the bomb search yesterday, that's all.”

Kurumada: “Is it true? Did ya really go over to the first island?”

Saiki remained silent, before nodding.

Hayasaka: “Why was that, Saiki?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, surely you could’ve gone ahead and chosen any other island that didn’t already have two people searchin’ it.”

Saiki: “ *It’s not that complicated. While I was searching around the fourth island, I kept thinking about where L would have most likely planted the bombs. But, the more I thought about it, the less the fourth island made any sense to be one of those places. After Bojack’s case, no one really favoured going back there so soon. The only person who did was L himself, because he still liked looking through all the information. And why would L plant bombs in only a place he goes* ?”

Hayasaka: “You… do have a point there.”

Saiki: “ *The first island was just much more likely to have bombs. Even though L claimed he might’ve placed them somewhere that wasn’t obvious, that could’ve just been a bluff to throw us off. I mean, we always go to the restaurant every morning, don’t we* ?”

Kurumada: “Hell, we even met up there today. Shit, now that I’m thinking about it, that does make a ton of sense.”

Saiki: “ *I know it was a risk abandoning a whole island, but I wanted to take it for the sake of everyone else* .”

Hayasaka: (“I can really see Saiki is trying to help the group. He really is keeping up his promise no matter what.”)

Kurumada: “I guess it didn’t matter where you went in the end, ‘cuz we never found a single bomb anyway. Still, good we got all the accounts now, eh?”

Hayasaka: “It’s been helpful to know them, at least.” (“It does concern me, though. If no one could even find one, then just where were the bombs?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Bomb Search

Kurumada: “Y’know, I’m glad we’ve been runnin’ into a ‘lotta good evidence so far.”

Hayasaka: “I suppose clues would be easier to find in a smaller room like this. Although, as much as we can’t stop yet, I’m unsure where to look now.”

Saiki: “ *I was going to look at that next* .”

Hayasaka: “ *That* ?”

Saiki pointed past them, back over to the opposite side of the room where a vent sat above a shelf.

Kurumada: “Does it look suspicious to you or something?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t know. But since we conducted that vent experiment with L, it might be worth checking out* .”

Hayasaka: “Do you mind if Kurumada and I come and look with you?”

Saiki: “ *I guess not* .”

The three then walked over underneath the vent at the far left shelf.

Hayasaka: “I don’t know if we can see if anything’s wrong with it from down here. Especially with the shelf in the way…”

Kurumada: “Hey, why don’t we just do the same thing we did last time when ya wanted to check out the roof window in the database?”

Hayasaka: “You mean…? Ah, well, I suppose… I don’t mind doing that, haha–”

SQUEAK

Hayasaka turned at the sound of wheels rolling as he saw Saiki had brought a chair from another part of the room, as well as a screwdriver. He felt a bit disheartened at the alternative solution, but shook off the disappointment as he realised he needed to focus.

Saiki stepped onto the chair, but as his head only reached the top of the shelf, he stood still. Then, he quietly stepped back down.

Kurumada: “Bwahaha! A lil’ too small to reach the vent, are we?”

If Hayasaka thought Natsuki could stare daggers, then Saiki’s cold eyes directed at Kurumada could definitely kill.

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, Kurumada, why don’t you just do it instead…?”

Saiki unwillingly dropped the screwdriver into Kurumada’s palm, almost seeming as if he wanted to miss and let it land on the floor instead. Kurumada simply shook his head in bemusement, hopping onto the chair and unscrewing the vent grille.

Hayasaka: “Is there anything worth noting up there?”

Kurumada: “Uh… Can’t see nothin’ out of the ordinary…”

Saiki: “ *I’m not satisfied with that* .”

Screwing the vent back up, Kurumada jumped down from the chair.

Kurumada: “Then what do you wanna do about it?”

Hayasaka: “Maybe… We could check the vents on the other floors, just to be safe.”

Saiki nodded, and the three left the storage room with the screwdriver. They went to unscrew the vents on the fifth and third floor, only to find nothing. However, once Hayasaka went to unscrew the vent on the second floor, he tilted his head at the odd sight.

Hayasaka: “Blood…?”

Kurumada: “Wait, there’s blood in there?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, t-there's small drops of blood that seem to stretch far back into the vent from here.”

Saiki: “ *Someone must’ve gone in there* .”

Kurumada: “It can’t have been Brian, right? Unless Monotora *did* attack him during the vent experiment.”

Hayasaka: “No, I don’t believe so. Brian was between the fifth and ninth floors during the vent experiment, not the second. And, with this much blood, we would’ve seen an injury on him when he returned.”

Kurumada: “Huh. Then, should we go n’ check the first floor’s vent too?”

Saiki had already started to make a move to the stairs, answering that question. But, like before, the vent down there was spotless too.

Hayasaka: (“So, only the second floor’s vent has blood in it? But, I don’t see why, being two floors down from the storage room. Not to mention after Brian had used the vents and was almost caught by Monotora, you would think no one would want to try going in them again.”)

Truth bullet obtained: Ventilation System

Kurumada: “Hell, things are lookin’ crazier than I thought. Y’know, it would be awfully nice to somehow just read everyone’s thoughts to see if anyone’s thinking something suspicious, haha.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah…! Hang on, s…someone *can* do that, can’t they?”)

Discreetly, Hayasaka peered over at Saiki.

Hayasaka: (“Although Saiki can’t read the thoughts of people himself, he does have that forced telepathy he used on me so I could read Brian’s thoughts. So, what if… he does that again, so I could find any suspicious thoughts? That way… It’d be a lot easier to catch L’s killer, wouldn’t it…?”)

As he slowly turned to the boy, a hopeful smile spread across his lips.

Hayasaka: “Hey, S-Saiki…”

Saiki: “…?”

Hayasaka: “I have a favour to ask of you. I know a way we can…”

‘ *Even if we’re all told we can just live on the island without having to kill someone, we’re all being forced to murder one way or another from the motives presented to us so far.* ’

‘ *No, it’s just a lie, plain and simple. A lie to lead us into a false sense of security, one where we believe we have free control over our actions. Their goal is to make everyone suffer. Therefore, a cycle sprouts: people die, the rest of us become more traumatised and depressed, repeating until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.* ’

Hayasaka paused.

Huh?

Why did he think about that? That must’ve been some random memory appearing in his mind, surely. So, just like some passing thought, he pushed it aside.

Hayasaka: (“...No, ah, no. No, no, no. What am I thinking? I can’t just ask Saiki to do something like that. I already know that Saiki using his powers in any capacity causes him immense pain. Going around reading everyone’s thoughts? That would just be torture. And, not to mention, that method would essentially be outing him of his powers to everyone else. That’s something I’d rather have Saiki do himself when he’s confident to do so. Even if we’re in the middle of a case… I can’t do something so selfish to Saiki’s secret he’s been keeping his whole life.”)

Quickly, Hayasaka shook his head.

Hayasaka: “A-Ah, nevermind. Just forget about what I said…”

Saiki: “ *Alright. I’m going to go now* .”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Why?”

Saiki: “ *We’re just running out of time standing around like this. We need to go back to investigating as much as possible* .”

Leaving on those words, Saiki headed off towards the stairs.

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Kurumada: “Talk about those teenage hormones…”

Hayasaka: “H-Ha–No, uh, Saiki’s, um, he’s right. We should return to the storage room too.” (“I can’t help but feel it… How cold Saiki was acting. No… He didn’t know what I was going to ask, did he? I really hope he understands I took back what I said…”)

With heavy steps, Hayasaka followed Kurumada back upstairs and towards the storage room.

Kurumada: “Hey, wanna go tell Brian about the bomb search accounts we got?”

Hayasaka: “Oh, sure.”

However, as the two walked over to L’s body, they found only Latte standing around.

Latte: “Hi, guys. How’re things going?”

Kurumada: “Good. Where’s Brian run off to?”

Latte: “Oh, you see, I noticed Brian was looking a little worn out, so I suggested to him that he should go take a break. Hm, was that not the right call to make? I know we only have so much time to look around…”

Kurumada: “Nah, it’s fine.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Then, did you see where he went?”

Latte: “He told me he was going to go to the infirmary downstairs.”

Hayasaka: “Thank you, Latte.”

Latte: “It’s no problem at all!”

The two headed back downstairs to the infirmary where they saw Brian sitting on the edge of the bed he was resting in before.

Brian: “Oh, hey! Uh… You guys aren’t here to tell me off for slacking, are you?”

Hayasaka: “Of course not, haha. You still have your injury to worry about, and you shouldn’t strain yourself too much on it.”

Kurumada: “Mind if we join you?”

Brian: “Oh, not at all. Here.”

Brian patted the space beside him, and the two sat down. Hayasaka relayed all the information they learnt so far from the others, even the results of the sledgehammer lifting.

Brian: “Hm… Alright. I think I get all of that. Thanks for going around to everyone for me.”

Hayasaka: “I’d assume this was rather beneficial for most of us to know the accounts.”

Brian: “U-Um, but what I actually meant is that usually *I’m* the one going around gathering information from people. So, it’s kinda nice I could have some friends to rely on, especially since I was still focused on L.”

Hayasaka nodded. Then, he noticed Kurumada drag his eyes across the room.

Kurumada: “Hey, Brian, I’m just wonderin’ something. You were in here the whole night last night, right?”

Brian: “Well, yeah. I was still resting my leg and all…”

Kurumada: “And, since you were only a floor below the storage room, didn’t ya hear anything suspicious happening?”

Hayasaka: (“Hear anything suspicious…? Huh, that odd feeling that I should know something about the storage room is back again…”)

Brian: “Um… Actually, I didn’t. But, it was only because of how loud the vents are at night, so if anything, I could only hear things from outside this room.”

Hayasaka: “Does that include the stairs as well?”

Brian: “Oh, yeah. I could hear them too.”

Kurumada: “Wait, really? Shit, this could get us a lead! Oi, Brian, what did you hear from the stairs?”

Brian: “Hm… I remember a pair of footsteps using the stairs around early evening. And then there was another when Hayasaka came to visit me. And finally… one more use once he left.”

Kurumada: “Eh? Was that it?”

Brian: “I didn’t hear anything else…”

Kurumada: “Gh, c’mon. I was expectin’ at least one pair of unexplainable footsteps…”

Hayasaka: (“That’s right. The first footsteps must have been L’s when he arrived at Nesos HQ first. Then, the next two belonged to me, when I arrived and left the infirmary. Wait, left…? I did… leave the building after tending to Brian, didn’t I…?”) “Ah, thank you for telling us that anyway, Brian.”

Brian: “You’re welcome. And, hey, don’t worry. There’s probably just something we’re overlooking here.”

Truth bullet obtained: Brian’s Account

Brian: “ *Sigh* …”

Brian then fell back onto the bed with a soft thud. Hayasaka and Kurumada looked over at him quizzically.

Kurumada: “Haha, has the wind been taken out of ya already?”

Brian: “Mm… I guess so. I’m just so stressed over this whole thing a lot more than usual. First, the vent-mishap with Monotora, then being attacked by someone, and now… this case. I mean, I hardly know what to focus on.”

Lowering his eyes, Hayasaka placed a gentle hand on Brian’s arm.

Hayasaka: “Isn’t it good you don’t have to face it alone…? Although it may be obvious, I’m quite nervous too. I’m scared to start having to suspect everyone again. But… What choice do we have?”

Kurumada: “I wonder… Can we make our own choices this time?”

Brian: “Huh? If we vote for someone other than the killer, we’ll all die, won’t we?”

Kurumada: “I didn’t mean it like that! I just… Y’know, winning n’ losing – it means nothing to Nesos anymore. From Mai’s trial alone, I can see now how dirty they play to get what they want.”

Hayasaka: “But is there anything we can do on our end?”

Kurumada: “...I don’t know. S’just a thought, really. But, if it’s possible to protect everyone here, then we gotta try.”

Looking over, Hayasaka saw Brian sit up. His face had been wiped over with determination.

Brian: “Yeah, that’s it. We have to believe in L’s death, not Nesos’ case.”

Hayasaka: (“When I see the resolve on both of their faces, I can’t help but smile. After all, I feel just the same.”)

DING DONG, BING BONG

Monotora: “Times up. I really don’t wanna be talkin’ to you lot right now, so just get yer asses over to Nesos Park. And don’t you dare try and complain about the walking distance, or I’ll tear your legs off. Let’s see what you’ll say then, huh?”

Hayasaka: (“Monotora’s just as angry as before…”) “Oh, Brian. Are you going to be okay walking all the way there by yourself?”

Brian looked over at the crutch leaning beside the bed. Propping it up, he nodded.

Brian: “Yeah. Let’s just… go, right?”

At that, they all began to leave Nesos HQ. As Hayasaka got to the lobby, however, he felt someone tug at his sleeve.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. What’s this?”

Hayasaka: “Hm?”

Kurumada lifted his hand up, and he paused at the small blood stain dried on his palm.

Hayasaka: “I-Is that mine…? Wait, no, perhaps… Was this from when I looked in that bloody second floor vent? Or…”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “I-I want to touch his neck.”

Brian: “Huh? Could, uh, could you say that again?”

Hayasaka: “I want… I want to touch L’s neck to get a better feel for the wound.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “…”

Kurumada: “Wherever ya got it from, it’s ‘prolly not good to be walking around with blood on you. Let’s go wash it off at the shore.”

Hayasaka: “Are you sure? Monotora is being rather antsy with the time…”

Kurumada: “We’ll be quick with it, promise.”

With a chaste nod from Hayasaka, the two made a re-route towards the fifth island shore. Hayasaka knelt down onto the sand, dipping his hand under the shallow water to allow the blood to soak off. Behind him, he noticed Kurumada take a seat on a rock.

Hayasaka: “Kurumada? We’re not going to be here for long.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, well… I was lyin’ a little before. I think you need this.”

Hayasaka: “Need what? We’re going to have to leave for the trial soon, don’t we?”

Kurumada: “That’s the part that’s worryin’ me. You’ve been so on edge in this investigation. Even if it’s just a small break, I wanna make sure you ain’t gonna be overwhelming yourself again so fast.”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada… He’s still not over earlier, is he? When I touched L’s neck.”) “Please, I’d much rather you not concern yourself over me. It’ll only make me feel bad. If anything, I was much more stressed out yesterday about the bombs.”

Kurumada: “Concernin’ myself over you is all I’m really good for. Then again, now that ya mention the bombs, why *were* you late to the restaurant this morning? I didn’t get to ask ya before.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, a-about that… This may be a little strange, but I actually woke up on the first island’s beach this morning, believe it or not…”

Kurumada: “The beach? The hell were you doin’ there?”

Hayasaka: “Haha, I don’t know either. After all, all I remember last night was being on the fifth isla– *ah* …”

Just like that, like a locked door finally being given its missing key, it all came back.

Hayasaka: “I… remember now.”

Kurumada: “Remember what?”

Hayasaka: “That… Last night, after I left Brian in the infirmary, I heard a loud crash come from somewhere upstairs. I got concerned, knowing L was supposed to be up there, so I went to investigate. However, when I tried looking around the storage room, I just… passed out. The next thing I knew, I had woken up on the first island’s beach. But, I didn’t see L, nor anyone else, and I don’t even know how I passed out at all.”

Wiping dry his hand with his opposite sleeve, Hayasaka turned to Kurumada. He was silent, as if he was taking in the story.

Kurumada: “...It sounds like you were knocked out to me.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, that might’ve been the only way, really. But, it doesn’t help to explain much else.”

Kurumada: “You should remember that account, in that case.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? Kurumada, I can’t use my own word as evidence…”

Kurumada: “Hey, ain’t everyone else’s accounts just their own word too? More importantly, don’t ya realise how important that sounds? You were at the scene of the crime.”

Hayasaka: “...I suppose you’re right.”

Kurumada: “...I’m just glad you weren’t caught up in anything. Or else, I don’t know what I’d do.”

Hayasaka: (“How chilling… But, it’s a little sweet. Then again… If I really was there where L died, I’m very lucky the killer didn’t get to me. So, just what happened in the storage room, and why on earth did I end up at the beach?”)

Truth bullet obtained: Hayasaka’s Account

Kurumada: “You ready to go now?”

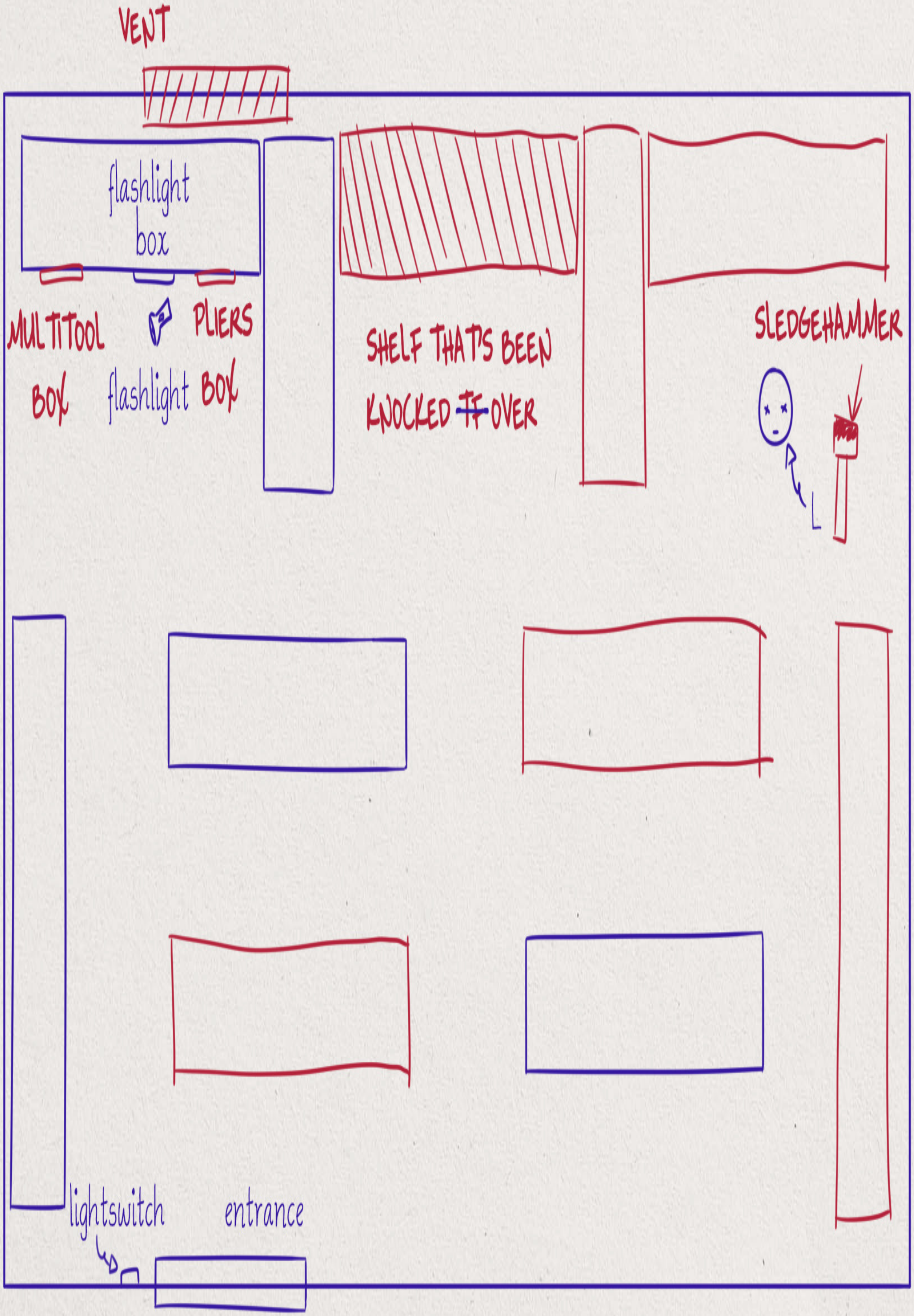
Hayasaka: “...Yes. It’s best not to keep the others waiting.”

The two stood up – Hayasaka brushing off the sand that stuck to his dress pants – and made their way to the island’s bridge. What they didn’t expect, however, was for someone else to be there loitering around, fiddling with his crutch.

Brian: “Ha… Hey. Um, I guess I was a bit unsure if I could walk all that distance on my own…”

Hayasaka let out a sympathetic sigh. He helped Brian over to Nesos Park, and while the trip there was silent, he knew why. Arriving, he saw Natsuki and Jesse practically shoulder-to-shoulder, looking down at a sheet of paper. Noticing the new arrivals, they walked up to them.

Natsuki: “We managed to finish the floor plan. I hope it’s somewhat coherent.”


VENT
flashlight box
MULTITOOL BOX
flashlight
PLIERS BOX
SHELF THAT'S BEEN KNOCKED ~~TF~~ OVER
SLEDGEHAMMER
L
lightswitch
entrance

Jesse: “Do you guys think this’ll be any helpful?”

Hayasaka: “It’ll be at least helpful to have a reminder where everything was…”

RATTLE

Latte: “Oh my…!”

Jesse: “Whoa, your hat’s vibratin’ like mad!”

???: “Lemme outta here!”

Flipping her hat off, Latte let Moony free.

Latte: “Hehe, looks like Moony woke up from her nap.”

Moony: “Yeah, and now I gotta be filled in with all the gossip I’ve missed! Like, did pink hair do anything wacky yet?”

Saiki: “ *Which pink hair* …?”

Kurumada: “Well, you’ve sure woken up just in time for the trial.”

Moony: “Trial? Ugh, c’mon! Hey, wait, one of you guys kicked the bucket again?”

Brian: “Yeah. Um… It was L.”

Moony: “Oh, that guy who I kept seeing eat all those cakes? *Hey, Ena* !”

Moony turned up to the sky.

Moony: “You better not bother that cake guy too much up there!”

Natsuki: “...Yeah! And, Yuri, maybe you could make them some tea or something.”

Moony: “Tea doesn’t exist up there, pinky!”

Natsuki: “E-Eh?”

Kurumada: “Hey, Mai. How about bakin’ some pastries too?”

Latte: “Ooh, in that case, why don’t you make some of that delicious milk bread?”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Haha…”

Monotora: “If you want those ‘people’ to have a lil’ tea party up there so badly, then I guess one of you is gonna be joinin’ them real soon. Or maybe you’ll just end up as a corpse down under. You’ll find out either way.”

Hayasaka paused as he glanced around at the group. Those words rang the obvious, yet the obvious felt so wrong.

Hayasaka: (“I don’t… want to think there’s a killer here this time. And, really, I should. After all, it’s been exactly like that for the previous cases. Then again, hasn’t this proved how stronger we’ve become? How we still deny the possibility, despite how many times it’s been proven right. Everyone here is someone I know more than when I woke up on the island for the first time. Everyone here is someone that won’t throw away the promises we’ve made to all those who have died.”)

Brian: “It doesn’t matter what you or Nesos want. I want to do this for L.”

With that, Brian placed his crutch down.

Monotora: “...Eh? Brian, have you gone and lost your crutch already? Hahaha, you really are such a clutz.”

Brian: “I don’t need it.”

Monotora: “ *Are you sure about that* ?”

Saiki: “ *Stop stalling. I want to go to the trial now.* ”

Monotora: “Oh, you want to go to the trial now? *Oh* , you want to go to the trial *now* ? Oh, oh, oh, pity the poor creature who wants to go to the trial now. I’m sick of you. Of all your demands. Your needs. When will it click? You don’t have rights, but only lives to which we will sacrifice for our gain. So, why you continue to hold on to these flickers of hope is beyond me. You can fight, claw and tear into the ones you hold most dear, but they rot all the same. ‘Cuz we ain’t in control. Nesos is.”

Monotora placed a paw on the loose tile.

Monotora: “...And the more you stop thinkin’ about it, the less it’s gonna hurt. The less you care, the more you can become what you were made to do.”

The mechanical beast then stepped down on the tile without another word, and the hidden staircase emerged once again.

Monotora: “Meet you down there, fuckers. Let’s have a fun trial, like always.”

Somehow, it felt as if Monotora’s yellow eye glowed much duller than usual. But Hayasaka couldn’t dwell on it as they were already gone.

Hayasaka: (“Monotora’s… changing. That’s the only thing I can say for sure. In what direction? That’s the thing I don’t know.”)

Latte: “...Hey, everyone. I know this won’t be easy. But, we have each other to rely on. So, even if you think you can’t do it, just pretend that you can, and eventually, you’ll start to believe it to be true.”

Natsuki: “I’m not even gonna let the idea of giving up get in my mind.”

Jesse: “Me neither. Nat, you can hit me if I look like I’m starting to slack off, yeah?”

Natsuki: “That’s a bit much, isn’t it? We’re not even standing next to each other in the trial room.”

Jesse: “Then you do it, Brian.”

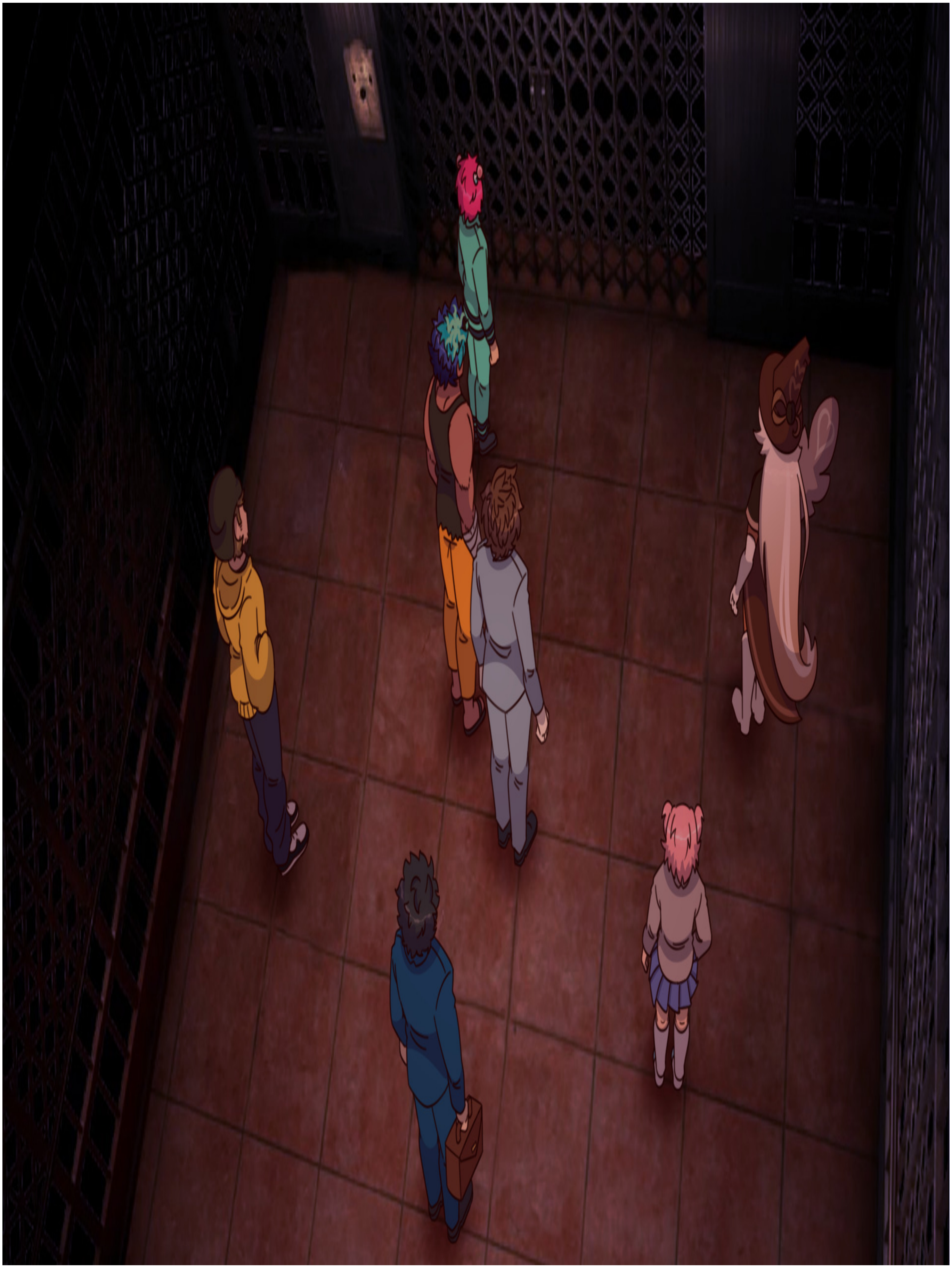
Brian: “Um, how about we just don’t hit each other…?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, but everyone’s determination is so motivating to see, isn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Well it looks like there’s no backing out now Hayasaka’s all fired up, eh?”

Brian: “Then there’s no more need to stand around. Let’s go.”

Together, the group descended the stairs towards the elevator.



It was conditioned at this point for Hayasaka to feel that cold breeze run past his body, flaring up his nerves at the next step in the case. But, this time would be different, as he had a way out of suffering alone. Glancing over at Kurumada, he softly brushed his hand against the other's. It was just enough to grab his attention, making him look down at the proposition. Kurumada smiled, taking in his hand once again. That warmth, although small, was just enough for him.

Jesse: "C'mon, just take some. You didn't even get to have any breakfast today."

Natsuki: "I-I'm not drinking from that, alright…?!"

Overhearing the loud whispering from behind, Hayasaka turned to see Jesse trying to hand his flask over to Natsuki.

Natsuki: "It's full of alcohol, isn't it? I don't drink that stuff, I told you."

Jesse: "What? No, yo. I refilled it with soda. It's diet, too."

Natsuki: "Wait, really? *Sip* . Oh, it is just soda. Jeeze, you should've just said that in the first place."

Jesse: "Hahaha."

Shaking his head, Hayasaka turned back around only to lock eyes onto Saiki a few ways in front. Of what he could make from his face, it was clear he was deep in thought.

Hayasaka: ("It's fine I didn't ask Saiki to use his powers during the investigation. We've managed without them this whole time, so–")

Moony: "Whoa, we got a couple'a hand holders over here!"

Hayasaka snapped his head towards Moony and Latte, the latter of which quickly putting a finger up to her lips.

Latte: “Moony! Shh!”

Kurumada: “Yeah, too bad you ain’t got no hands. Really missin’ out here, you are.”

Moony: “Trust me, I’ve had my fill of hands-on excitement around Ena.”

Brian: “Haha…”

At the ridiculous situation where Hayasaka assumed he was going to cover his face in absolute embarrassment, he couldn’t help but smile instead. No matter what, they were all allies, sometimes saying silly things because that’s just how they were.

‘Their goal is to make everyone suffer. Therefore, a cycle sprouts: people die, the rest of us become more traumatised and depressed, repeating until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.’

“...Did you kill Walter, Hiroshi ?”

“Your arms are not clean, Kaidou. T-The scratches – they’re hidden under your bandages, aren’t they…?”

“...A-Are you the killer? ... Mai ?”

“Jesse… You never killed Bojack when you pushed him. He just pretended to be dead.”

Hayasaka: (“...Wh…Why am I remembering these things…? There’s no reason why I should be thinking of… Why are all of these coming back to me now–”)

DING

Latte: “Ah, here we are…”

Natsuki: “This elevator ride feels like it’s getting longer and longer, isn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Wonder what’s changed down here this time…”

Hayasaka: (“...That’s right. Ignore it. Just focus on what’s ahead.”)

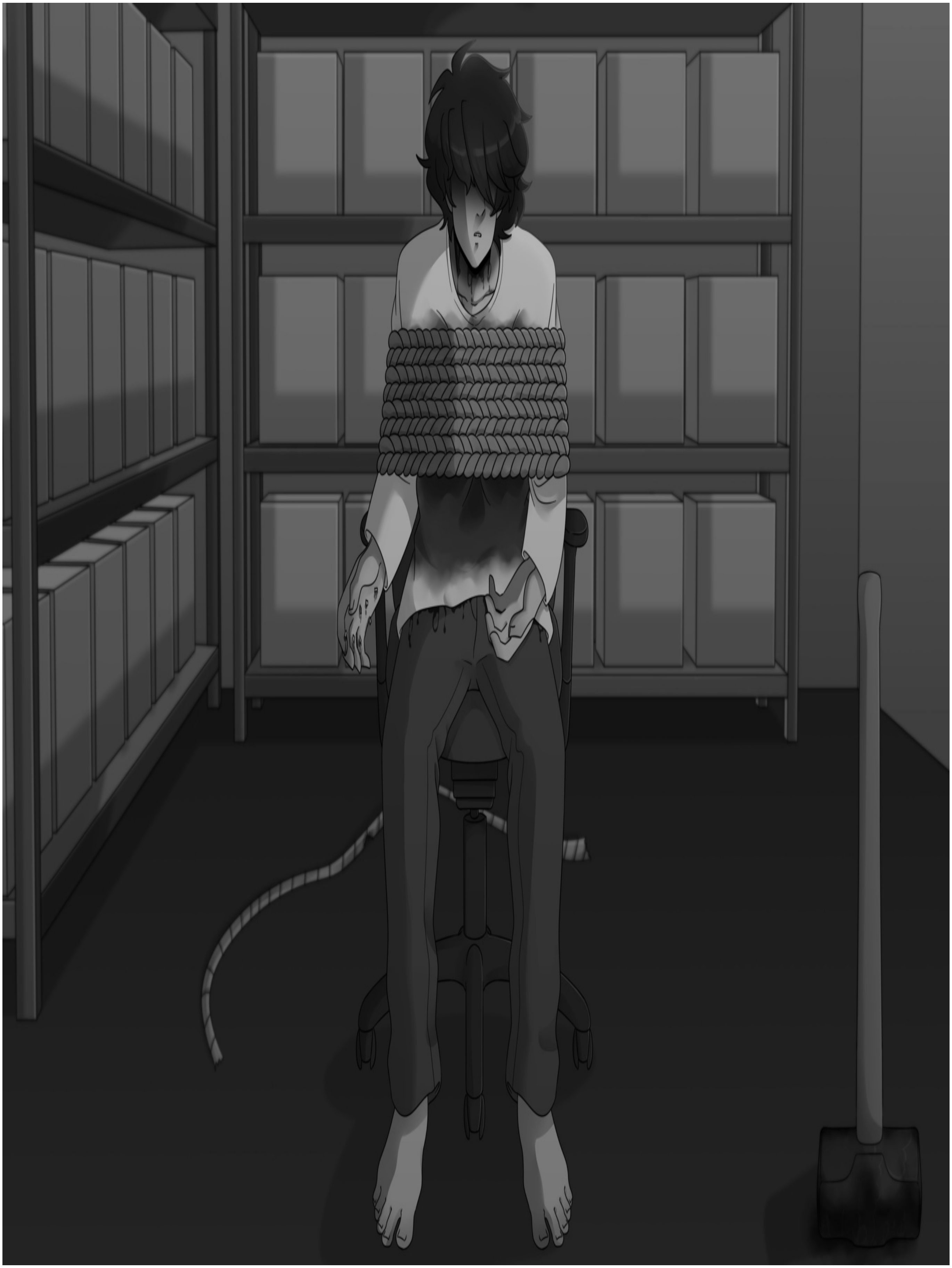
Brian: “Huh. Things look pretty… red.”

Jesse: “Have the fish killed each other or something?”

Monotora: “Great colour, ain’t it? Red… The colour of bloodshed, the colour of hopelessness in a hopeless world. ‘Course, doesn’t hold a candle to yellow – that’s my favourite colour.”

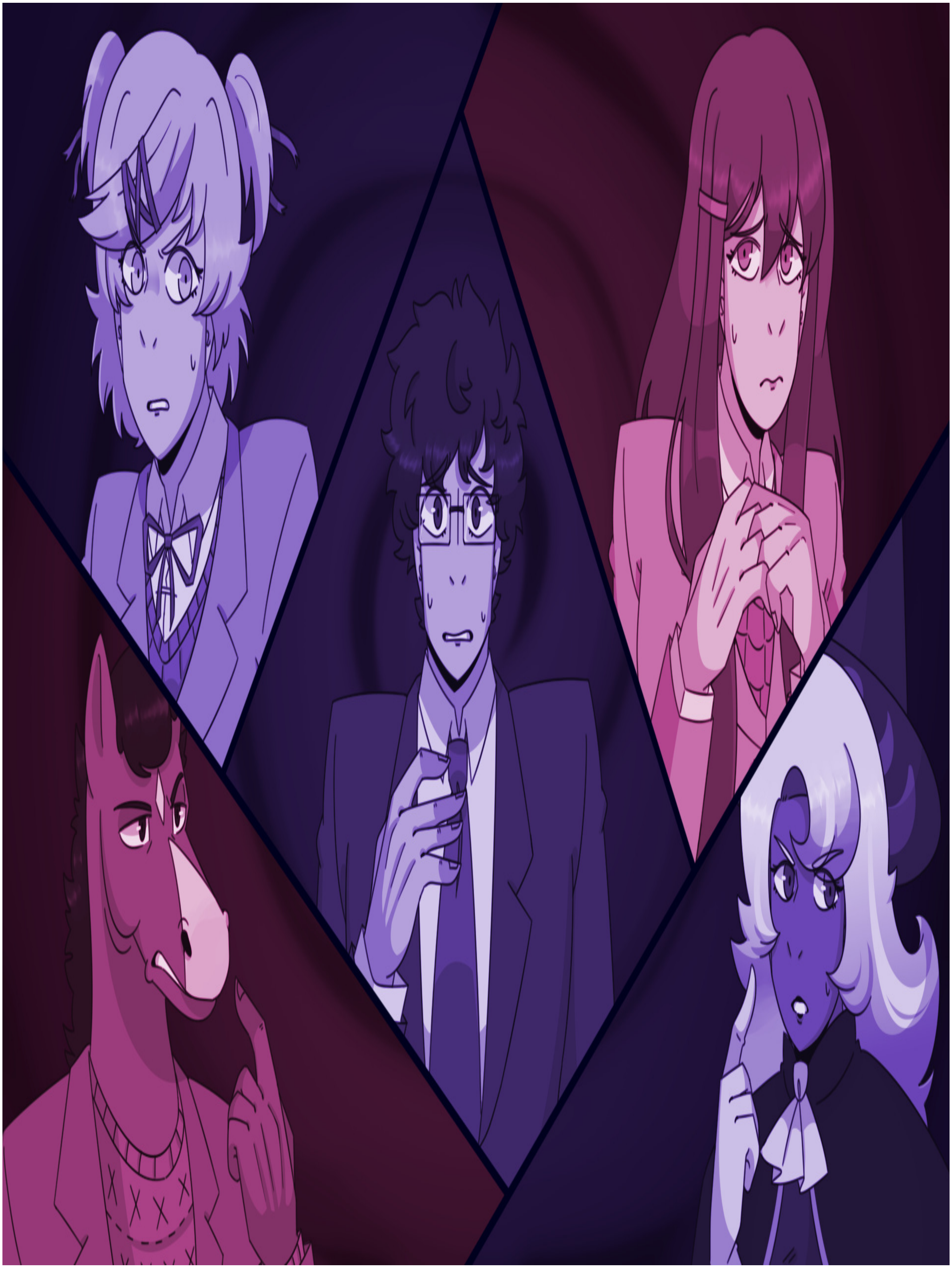
Saiki: “ *That was random trivia we didn’t care to know* …”

There wasn’t much else to say. Everyone walked over to their podiums. Hayasaka looked over at L’s new portrait.

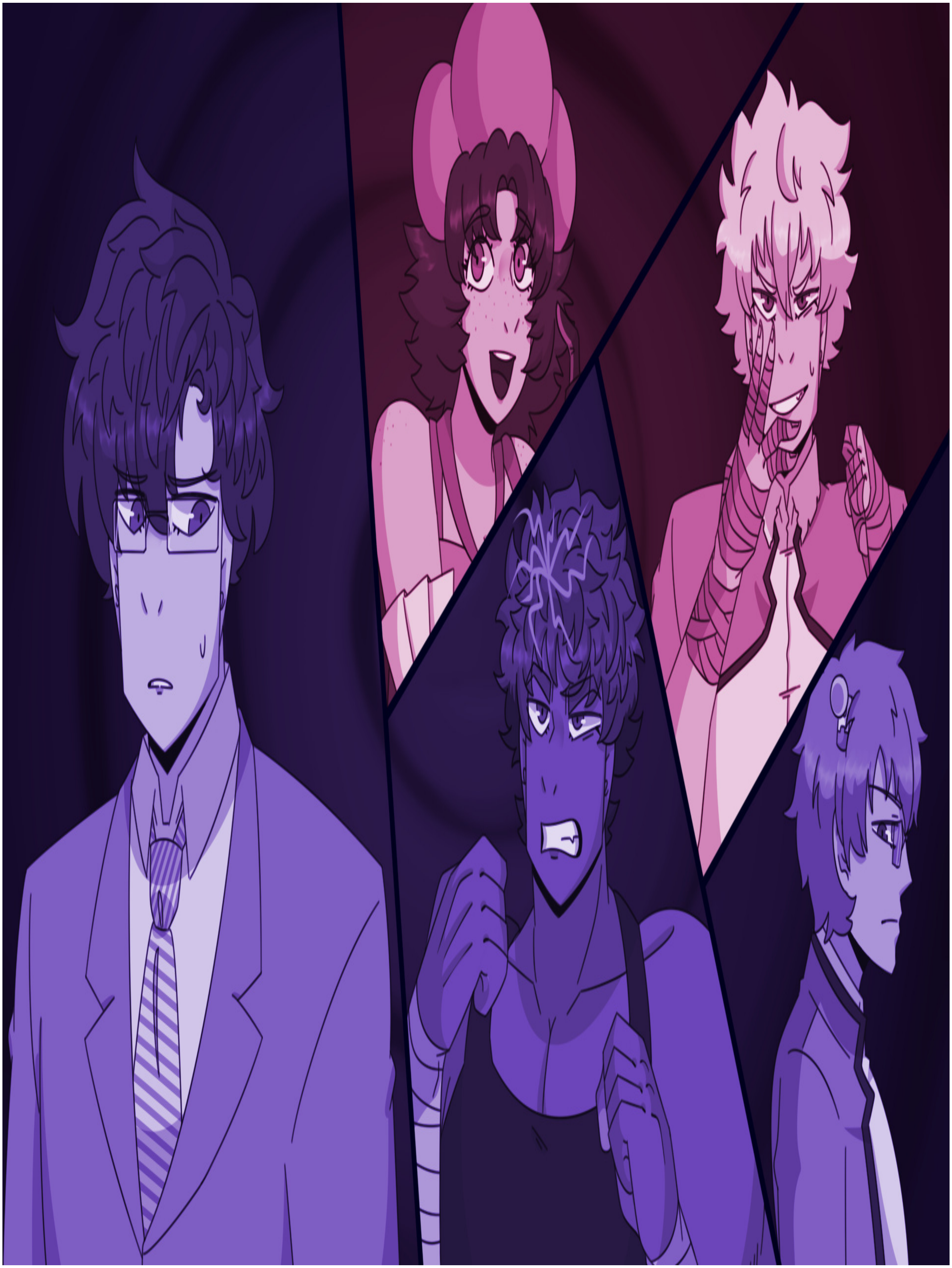


Hayasaka: (“...What can I say about L? L was… an enigma. Intelligent, yet formal. He was snarky at times. Yet empathetic other times. Other than on the surface, what did I truly know about L? I didn’t even know his last name until after he died. Even his bomb threat felt out of line for such an unpredictable man. But truly the most baffling thing L ever did… was to die.”)

Hayasaka: ("If L was here right now, would things be easier? Or, would he just become less and less clear as time went on?")



Hayasaka: (“Would I feel less inclined to feel bad about suspecting everyone again? Or, would nothing change?”)



Hayasaka: (“Nothing feels like it’s changing, and yet everything feels like it is, too. I don’t want to be here. Not at all. Fate has me dragged by the chain, and it tightens every time I resist.”)

The thought was commonplace, but he refused to let it simmer. Unfortunately for him, formalities must be met.

So, the fifth executive trial had begun.

Chapter End Notes

> I think someone needs to tell Hayasaka it's ok not to touch men every 5 seconds /JJJJ (😁)
>
> So then, I wonder who the killa could be... Do you know? Do I know? Perhaps we shall find out in 2 weeks time... Perhaps indeed...
>
> Funfact, this time around I formatted the chapter while an RTgame video played in the background (princess peach showtime, very cute game so far)

Chapter 5: The Fault in Our Scars (Executive Trial)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> Did you know: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (by Roald Dahl) is 30,644 words long? Well did you know you can read that a lot faster than what you're about to because this chapter is clocking in at a wild 36k words. This is either a moment in DR69/96 history or maybe I need to dial back the mental illness
>
> I don't really know how to prepare anyone for this because I wasn't prepared myself. A drink or two might be good. Also happy 4/20 :-}
>
> I guess it's finally time to seek out the killer of detective emo...!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The more they lose, the louder the group's promise becomes to end Nesos' vile game. Well… that was the plan. L – their safety card – gets ripped from their already tiny headcount. The remaining seven will have to work together to prove they can overcome this pain once more. Even if one of those seven may be the killer. Will this cycle ever end?

TRUTH BULLETS

NESOS FILE 5

The Victim is L Lawliet. The body was discovered in the 4th floor storage room in Nesos HQ on the 5th island. The victim has suffered a blow to the abdomen, and additionally a crushed windpipe. Small cuts are present in the victim's right hand.

L'S NECK WOUND

A deep, dark bruise around L's neck. From examination, there appears to be no nail marks. Additionally, it has been confirmed that his windpipe is broken.

L'S ABDOMEN WOUND

A large, dark bruise covers L's abdomen. It appears darker on his back than on the front. Although it is sure to have done internal damage, it is uncertain if the wound was fatal.

GLASS SHARDS IN L'S HAND

Small, thin shards are lodged into L's palm and the inside of his fingers of his right hand.

L’S SITTING POSITION

According to Brian, L would always sit with his knees up to his chest, claiming it would deplete his reasoning ability by 40% otherwise. However, L here has been identified to be sitting with his knees down.

ROPE AROUND L

Rope has been tied around L's arms and waist against the chair he's currently sat in. There is minimal blood on the rope. It has been theorised that he was tied up for interrogation purposes, likely due to his bomb threat.

SCUFFED ROPE

Behind the chair L is sitting in, there is a medium length piece of rope with a scuff in the middle. It would have to be rubbed at for a fray like this to appear.

SLEDGEHAMMER

A little ways away from L, there is a sledgehammer with its head covered in blood. After an experiment, it has been confirmed that anyone in the group is able to lift and swing the sledgehammer, apart from Natsuki.

KNOCKED OVER STORAGE SHELF

The middle-back storage shelf has been found knocked back into the wall, causing its contents to spill backwards. It has caused a large crack to form in the wall, despite the wall being made out of strong material.

BROKEN FLASHLIGHT

By the left-back storage shelf, there is a flashlight on the ground with its glass smashed and broken. The switch is set to on. As it lies just above its original box, it couldn't have been transported very far.

BOX OF FIREARMS

The left-back storage shelf hosts a box full of firearms. They have been identified as, but not limited to: m16s, g19s, rugers and a dart gun.

MULTITOOL

A swiss army knife was found lying on the top of a box full of pliers. Despite there being a box for multitools nearby, it's uncertain why it wasn't in its correct box.

DENT ON LIGHTSWITCH

On the lightswitch beside the storage room's entrance, there is a circular dent with a small diameter. The lights do not appear to be damaged. However, the lightswitch is very sensitive, and can be turned on and off with the slightest touch. The lights had been turned on when the group came to the storage room to find L.

VENTILATION SYSTEM

The ventilation system in Nesos HQ connects all floors together with a single vent. Drops of blood have been found in the 2nd floor office cubicles' vent.

BOMB SEARCH

After L's bomb threat, everyone had split up for the rest of the day and night to search for the bombs. Natsuki and Jesse searched the 1st island, Kurumada searched the 2nd island, Latte searched the 3rd island, and Saiki searched the 4th island. Hayasaka, Brian and L were on the 5th island. According to everyone who searched for the bombs, no one could find any.

NATSUKI'S ACCOUNT

When the group had split off yesterday to search for the bombs, Natsuki and Jesse were together investigating the 1st island. At no time did the two split up. At one point, however, they saw Saiki, who claimed he couldn't find any information on the 4th island and stuck with the two for the rest of the night.

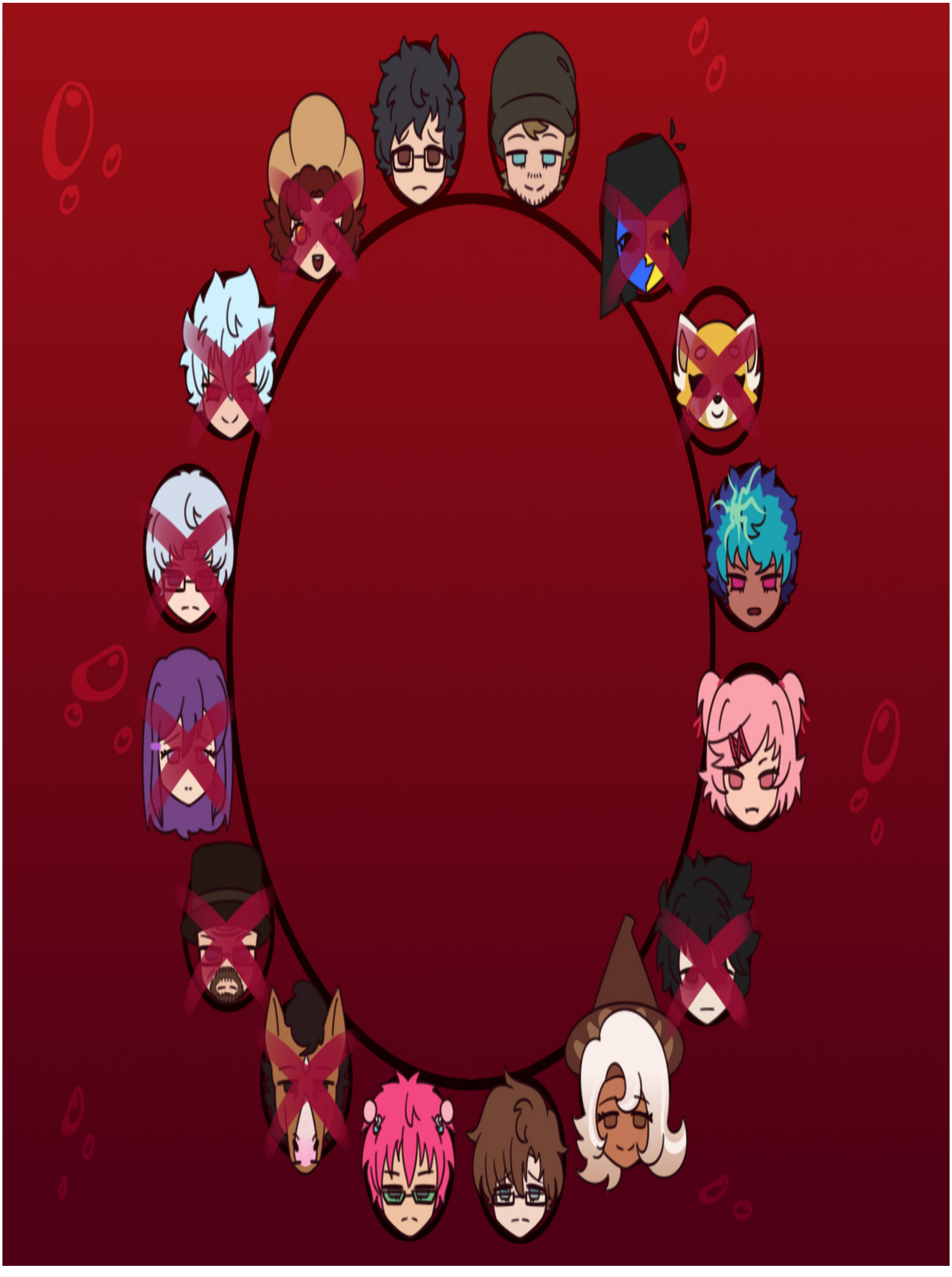
BRIAN'S ACCOUNT

Ever since Brian was attacked, he had been resting in the 3rd floor infirmary in Nesos HQ. He could only hear the footsteps of people walking past the 3rd floor. According to Brian, he heard one set of footsteps at the stairs around evening. Later on, he heard another set of footsteps, which belonged to Hayasaka who was coming to check on him. After Hayasaka left, he heard the last pair of footsteps at the stairs. He never heard anything else after this.

HAYASAKA'S ACCOUNT

When Hayasaka left the 3rd floor infirmary just before nighttime, he heard a loud crashing noise from the 4th floor storage room above. He went to investigate, however before he could find anything, he was knocked unconscious. He then woke up on the 1st island's beach around morning and was found by Saiki.

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: ALL RISE!



Monotora: "..."

Kurumada: "Ain't gonna do the trial explanation this time?"

Monotora: "Ya already fuckin' know it."

Natsuki: "Jeeze… No need to be so rude about it."

Brian: "..."

Jesse: "...Well? Are we gonna start talkin,' or?"

Brian: "I'm just taking a moment to think, if that's alright."

Latte: "Take as much time as you need, dear!"

Saiki: " *He doesn't actually have all the time in the world, you know?* "

Hayasaka: ("If I can have a bit of time to think to myself, then… We gathered a lot of evidence during the investigation, even though the Nesos file proved bare. I'll need to use every little detail we have to help figure things out. As we don't have L… Ah, I really need to stop thinking that way.") "...Alright. I'm ready when you all are."

Kurumada: "Nice. Now I'm feelin' confident with that look on ya face, haha. Where do we all wanna start, then?"

Latte: "Hum… I may have one. I want to understand the purpose behind L's bomb threat."

Jesse: "I think he meant like, topics to do with the case."

Latte: “But still, I don’t understand why someone who claimed to want to help everyone by uncovering the identity of Nesos would go and put everyone in danger. It’s just so counterintuitive.”

Hayasaka: (“She must be referring to what L said at the end of the fourth trial…”)

FLASHBACK

L: “Such a bold claim. And yet, do you believe this will last any longer?”

Monotora: “Hrm?”

L: “Perhaps you’ve become ignorant to the resolve. Or, you simply don’t want to face reality. Regardless, Nesos will not be able to stay safe for much longer. I intend to uncover the mystery of who you truly are very soon.”

FLASHBACK END

Kurumada: “He never exactly said he was doin’ it to help anyone else, though.”

Brian: “I… agree it *is* weird for L to have done that, but… As we know, L was unpredictable.”

Saiki: “ *But he wasn’t deadly unpredictable.* ”

Brian: “N-No, um, what I meant was that L always had a reason for anything he did, right?”

Hayasaka: “That isn’t wrong. Things like the microphone experiment back in the second case, the vent experiment a few days ago, ah, even all the little things he never did without purpose.”

Natsuki: “Well, whatever reason he thought threatening everyone's lives with bombs was a good idea, it really got to whoever killed him.”

Jesse: “Yeah, he was ‘prolly targeted ‘cuz he basically sent us all to death with his traitor bullshit.”

Saiki: “ *I wouldn't necessarily be thanking this killer. It's only caused more problems for us* .”

Kurumada: “I guess the bomb threat seems like pretty good motivation behind L’s death. As long as it’s provable.”

Hayasaka: (“Then, all we need to do is prove it with some evidence, right? Of course, without L, things can run smoothly as long as we sustain a calm discussion. Haah, I can almost feel my nerves calming. Almost.”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Natsuki: “I mean, I understand what you’re asking, but how do we prove an interrogation?”

Jesse: “Easy, you just find things that could be used in one. Like a weapon or somethin’.”

Latte: “Well, there was the sledgehammer…”

Brian: “Um, but a weapon isn’t really strong evidence for just an interrogation, is it?”

Jesse: “‘Course! Like, hey, tell me where the bombs are or I’m gonna beat your insides!”

Natsuki: “Jesse! That’s a bit too far don’t you think?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, and anyway, L could just run away if you tried to beat ‘im.”

Natsuki: “That wasn’t what I meant!”

Latte: “But **L couldn't move**! He was tied up, remember Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “I know! I don’t got dementia or some shit!”

Saiki: “ *Keep this up and you might in the future* …”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, that’s right. That would prove an interrogation quite well…”)

ROPE AROUND L

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I think we have our proof of an interrogation. As L was tied up, he wouldn’t be able to move. In such a vulnerable state, that’s how the culprit could try and pry answers from him.”

Latte: “I remember we talked briefly about that possibility during the investigation, too.”

Kurumada: “In that case, the killer clearly had a hard time tryn’a question someone like L. It must’a led to a frustrated murder.”

Brian: “Huh? Well, I’m not sure if that happened…”

Kurumada: “Why not? Ya got a problem when I make a theory?”

Brian: “N-No?”

Hayasaka: “H-Hang on. I think I know what Brian’s talking about…”

L’S SITTING POSITION

Hayasaka: “It’s the way we found L sitting, isn’t it?”

Brian: “Yeah. For L to use his reasoning ability, he needs to sit with his knees up to his chest, otherwise it’ll deplete by 40%.”

Saiki: “ *What kind of ridiculous requirement is that* ?”

Brian: “I-I promise it’s true! L told me himself.”

Latte: “Oh, but L was sitting normally with his knees down, wasn’t he?”

Brian: “So, how would he even be able to answer the killer properly if he wasn’t sitting in his correct position?”

Natsuki: “Maybe the killer just didn’t know that? I sure didn’t…”

Brian: “But L would just be able to tell them that fact, wouldn’t he?”

Jesse: “Okay, and would they even care?”

Brian: “Huh?”

Kurumada: “The killer would ‘prolly think L was tryn’a pull their leg with such a dumbass-sounding request. Hell, it could’ve even sounded like a trick to get outta the ropes.”

Saiki: “ *And why would L even need his reasoning ability if he was just being questioned?* ”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Brian! It was good you brought this up, anyway. We can think of this as a little warm up.”

Moony: “I’m pretty cold over here, yaknow…”

Brian: “H-Hrm…”

Hayasaka: (“Brian… He looks a little embarrassed….”) “Um, l-let’s recall the current theory. We believe L was tied up and interrogated about the bombs’ locations.”

Jesse: “He must’a been tortured for answers, and then killed outta spite.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so how was L even tied up in the first place?”

Kurumada: “Guess he would’ve needed to get the jump on for the killer to actually pin him down.”

Jesse: “Huh? Would it really be that hard? L didn’t really strike me as the strong type, y’know? I always saw him just sittin’ there, doing nerd stuff and eating sweets.”

Saiki: “ *That just makes him sound sad* .”

Brian: “Um, well, even if we didn’t know L’s physical strength, his inhuman intelligence wasn’t to be taken lightly. It’s unlikely he could’ve been caught off guard so easily.”

Latte: “Let’s try and think about it then, hm?”

Natsuki: “Wait, I’ve got an idea! L wouldn’t have to have been snuck up on if it was someone he trusted, right?”

Hayasaka: “What do you mean?”

Natsuki: “During the third trial, L proposed the idea himself. He said that in Yuri’s original murder plans, her goal was to get everyone to vote for her, and in doing so would overlook the true killer, being, u-um, me.”

Jesse: “But ‘cuz we all trusted you, we didn’t have the idea to suspect you at first.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, so, what if it was something similar here?”

Kurumada: “Ya mean L could’ve been tricked by someone he trusted? Uh, was it even possible for L to trust anyone here enough for him to put his guard down around ‘em, though?”

Moony: “I always sorta saw him as a lone-wolf type. No friends, livin’ in the woods…”

Brian: “L did have friends!”

Moony: “But did he live in the woods?”

Saiki: “ *We’re going to start ignoring you soon* .”

Hayasaka: “W-Well, to answer Kurumada’s question, the only people he ever regularly interacted with the most would’ve been his investigation group. That being: Brian, Saiki and I.”

Jesse: “So if one of you three approached L all casual-like, do you think there’d be a chance of gettin’ the jump on him?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, um, I’m rather doubtful of that. Remember what L said in the restaurant?”

FLASHBACK

L: “The traitor *will* eventually reveal themself. That’s why I gave them quite the generous time limit to do so. And, when they do decide to confess, they can find me at Nesos HQ. Surely, they’re already quite familiar with the building they’ve been working under, so I deem it the best place to converse with them.”

L then trudged past everyone towards the restaurant doors. He barely turned his head back enough as he muttered one last message.

L: “I’m excited to meet you. Let us have a good chat when the time comes.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “L was only anticipating the arrival of the so-called traitor to come and meet him.”

Brian: “Oh, so no matter who stepped foot into the storage room, L would’ve automatically suspected them as coming clean about being the traitor.”

Hayasaka: “And even if they did try to explain themselves otherwise, it’s not unlikely L would’ve kept his guard up just by proxy.”

Jesse: “Not *everyone* , though…”

Hayasaka: “Huh?” (“Wait, is there someone that could bypass this suspicion? Actually, there is. There’s one person who managed to prove their innocence that they can’t be the traitor, although they had to suffer an injury to do so.”) “...You’re talking about Brian, right?”

Brian: “M…Me?”

Kurumada: “Oh, I see. If Brian went to the storage room, L wouldn’t have much to suspect him over. After all, he was the victim of the suspected traitor attack.”

Latte: “But, that means… Was it possible that this murder was done by Brian of all people?”

Brian: “W-W-Wait what?! M-Me?! I didn’t kill L! I-I don’t even know what you guys are talking about!”

Saiki: “ *You do realise that all your stuttering just makes you look more suspicious, right?* ”

Brian: “But – that is – I didn’t even know about L’s bomb threat until Hayasaka told me about it last night! And, well, the other more glaring and obvious fact here, is that I couldn’t walk! I was still resting my leg at the time, s-so I couldn’t have travelled upstairs and done anything to L even if I really wanted to!”

Hayasaka: “B-Brian…”

Natsuki: “...Not really. It doesn’t matter if you were told late. You still had all night to strike as we don’t know L’s time of death.”

Jesse: “And who says you couldn’t walk? We literally saw you walk around fine with that crutch. If you had that crutch last night too, I bet even L would’a lowered his guard around you lookin’ so weak and harmless.”

Moony: “Maybe you even hobbled a lil’ like an old man who needs his sponge bath and bingo game.”

Latte: “But Brian, you didn’t, did you…?”

Brian: “N…No! I didn’t! I’m not trying to make excuses – these are real reasons! I-I still couldn’t walk at all this morning, and I didn’t even have the crutch before Monotora gave it to me! Even Hayasaka and Kurumada had to walk me to the park…! Hayasaka, you know that, don’t you…?!”

Hayasaka: “O-Of course I do!”

Brian: “And, Kurumada…!”

Kurumada: “...”

Brian: “Kurumada…?”

Kurumada: “...Yeah! Yeah, fuck! Brian couldn’t have done shit on his own! For us to suspect the guy with an injury… Shit! That’s just ridiculous!”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, Kurumada…”)

Natsuki: “...Hey, you said Hayasaka told you about the bomb threat, right?”

Hayasaka: “Huh…? Well, yes, I told Brian about L’s bomb threat when I went to check on him last night.”

Jesse: “Hey… In that case, if Brian couldn’t have physically done it on his own, maybe he had an able-bodied accomplice to help him out.”

Hayasaka: “What…?”

Latte: “You’re not saying Brian teamed up with Hayasaka, are you…?”

Kurumada: “Ya *really* better not be.”

Jesse: “W-We’re just sayin’, yo! Mr. Hayasaka could’a gave him a hand with walking up the stairs to the storage room, and with cornering and tying up L.”

Natsuki: “Maybe that was why he offered to take care of Brian too? Then, it would look less suspicious when they were alone together.”

Jesse: “Hell, what if Mr. Hayasaka was the one to attack Brian too–”

Brian: “ *Stop* …! That’s–That’s impossible! All impossible! Hayasaka wasn’t the one to attack me! When I was attacked, I heard his voice! I can even remember what he said!”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Hey…! W-What’s going on?!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “B-Brian…”

Brian: “And it’s not just that. I was attacked the day before L announced his bomb threat. So, it doesn’t make sense for us to have started a plan before anything even happened. And, because Hayasaka only told me about the bomb threat last night, it’s not like we would’ve had the time to even come up with a plan to kill L.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, ya hear that? So stop suspectin’ Brian already!”

Natsuki: “Okay, okay! So it’s not Brian! But, you know, it can still be…”

Latte: “...Hayasaka?”

Moony: “Wow you glasses dudes do NOT get a break around here, I’ll tell ya that much.”

Jesse: “Yeah, ‘cuz if Mr. Hayasaka couldn’t have been the one to attack Brian, surely L would’a figured as much too. Then, he knew he wasn’t the traitor, either.”

Saiki: “ *Then, are you saying that L’s guard would be down if he went to the storage room because of that fact* ?”

Kurumada: “If that was the damn case, then why didn’t L tell us he didn’t suspect Hayasaka back at the restaurant?”

Natsuki: “Does that part even matter? It probably wasn’t as important to him. L was more pressed on who the traitor was rather than who it wasn’t.”

Kurumada: “None of that shit even matters, anyway! Hayasaka *didn’t* go to the storage room! Once he was done with Brian, he left Nesos HQ. End of fuckin’ story.”

Hayasaka: (“What…? Hang on, Kurumada, I told you what really happened. I told you I went upstairs to the storage ro– *ah* … No, I see. I see what he’s doing. If he exposed what actually happened, with the mystery of how I was knocked out and woke up on the beach not even explainable by myself, my suspicion would surely skyrocket. It’s a lie, I know, but I also know Kurumada’s only doing this to protect me.”)

Latte: “Is that true, Hayasaka? Did you leave Nesos HQ after tending to Brian?”

Hayasaka: “...Yes. I did.”

Brian: “Oh, so where did you go afterwards, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “U-Um…”

Jesse: “I don’t really recall ever seein’ you at all during the bomb search…”

Latte: “I didn’t run into you either, dear.”

Hayasaka: (“Oh god… Are we really going to be caught out on our lie this fast?”)

Brian: “...Oh well. I’m sure it doesn’t matter. After all, since you weren’t being suspected as the traitor by L, you’d have no reason to go to him.”

Saiki: “ *Exactly. You all jump to such useless conclusions sometimes. Leave him alone already* .”

Hayasaka: “Ah, Saiki…” (“Even he agrees, even though he knows something was wrong with me waking up on the beach. Thank you, Saiki…”)

Kurumada: “Right. So let’s drop this shit here, yeah?”

Natsuki: “I guess we should. S-Sorry, Hayasaka. And Brian, too…”

Hayasaka: “I-It’s alright…” (“Although our lie has been hidden for now, I need to keep in mind my side of the story. Whoever killed L was most likely the same person who knocked me out when I went to the storage room.”)

Jesse: “So, if Brian and Mr. Hayasaka are off the table in terms of suspects, who do we gun for now?”

Latte: “Oh, but should we go ahead and accuse again so soon? I really hate going around and suspecting you all anymore.”

Saiki: “ *I don’t really want to, either* .”

Jesse: “Heheh, looks like Saiki’s gained a heart in him.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t twist my words. I’m just saying we should actually go back and focus on the murder, rather than chase around who did it. Pointing fingers won’t do us any good, and if L ever had a good idea, it was that* .”

Brian: “Well, that was a little nice, I guess…”

Latte: “I think it’s a good idea, too. Let’s go back and focus on what happened to L.”

Natsuki: “So, like we said before, L was tied up after getting the jump on somehow, and killed when he refused to give out answers about the bombs.”

Kurumada: “We just gotta figure out which wound came first during this whole torture-for-answers get up.”

Hayasaka: (“And if we can get a starting point for his wounds, we can slowly unravel the mysteries behind L’s case…)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “So, just to be clear, the wounds we found on L were the ones on his neck and abdomen.”

Latte: “And those little glass shards piercing his right hand!”

Brian: “Well, I don’t think they’re that important here…”

Jesse: “A wound’s a wound. You never know if that was the first blow to stun L.”

Kurumada: “Some tiny ass glass wouldn’t stun shit!”

Natsuki: “I mean, it would hurt a little bit.”

Kurumada: “Like a papercut. So nothin’!”

Natsuki: “It’s different for someone like you, you know!”

Kurumada: “What’s that s’posed to mean?! Argh, the **neck wound was ‘prolly the first blow** or somethin’.”

Brian: “Now it sounds like you don’t really care what wound came first…”

Hayasaka: (“Hm… No, that doesn’t sound very right. Ah, but I can’t blame him: his anger blinded his reasoning…”)

L’S NECK WOUND

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Actually, Kurumada, when you think about it, the neck wound would have to come last. I highly doubt even someone like L could have survived a crushed windpipe.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah. Then, that means it was the abdomen wound first. I mean, I knew that, but I just got distracted!”

Natsuki: “Distracted is a stretch…”

Latte: “So what do you think caused such a big wound on his abdomen? Was it the sledgehammer?”

Jesse: “It’s gotta be. Plus, with all that blood on the head, it was definitely used to do something in on L.”

Brian: “But what about his neck wound? Was that also done with the sledgehammer?”

Hayasaka: “Hm… It does feel like an odd place to use such a weapon.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, with such a small area like the neck compared to all the space ya can whack at on his abdomen, the sledgehammer don’t suit it.”

Moony: “Whack a mole, baby. Or, whack an emo?”

Natsuki: “But if the sledgehammer wasn’t used on L’s neck, what else was?”

Brian: “Maybe it wasn’t blunt force trauma? It could’ve been strangulation instead.”

Jesse: “True. But for someone to strangle L so hard that his windpipe got crushed? Damn, man, that’s some total brutality right there.”

Latte: “Are you sure strangulation was possible? Even if someone squeezed as hard as they could, would they have the physical means to do so, and not simply just block his airway?”

Saiki: “ *What a morbid explanation from someone like you* .”

Latte: “Oops, sorry! Did I scare you? I just recalled some things I learned in anatomy lessons.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, squeeze as hard as they could, huh? I… recall when I squeezed my fingers down on his neck and… *Gh* … No, I shouldn’t be thinking about that, it just makes me feel nauseous.”)

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “...”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...Huh? Why has everyone gone quiet? Wait, no, they all have their eyes on someone… Oh. Oh, I see. There’s been a silent, but mutual: ‘ *he* could have done it, couldn’t he?’ But… that person is…”)

…

Kurumada: “... *Sigh* .”

Monotora: “Achievement obtained: be suspected of murder in three different trials! Gahaha!”

Kurumada: “Thanks *, asshole* .”

Hayasaka: “Wh… No… Surely, you all can’t be suspecting Kurumada over something so small, could you?”

Jesse: “Our… choices are limited, yo.”

Brian: “Well, I guess for such a crazy thing like a windpipe to be crushed, it could only be done with a tool or a strong person.”

Natsuki: “But since we already decided the weapon was unlikely, it has to be a hands-on kind of thing, right?”

Jesse: “Kinda makes some sense, too. Even if Kurumada wasn’t in L’s good books like Brian n’ Mr. Hayasaka, it doesn’t take a genius to realise he could’a got the strike on him pretty easily.”

Latte: “Are you saying Kurumada was the one to tie L up, used the sledgehammer on him, and strangled him?”

Jesse: “The keyword’s *easy* , ain’t it? He’s pretty capable of all of that easy. And ‘specially the last part – he must’a strangled L with his bare hands once he got so mad about him refusing to speak up about the bombs.”

Natsuki: “And, I mean, with his anger issues…”

Kurumada: “ *Anger issues* , eh…?”

Brian: “You don’t, erm, seem very pressed as you usually do about being suspected of murder…”

Saiki: “ *He’s probably come to accept it at this point. He even got congratulated for it happening so regularly…* ”

Kurumada: “Nah, it’s simpler than that. It’s ‘cuz I didn’t strangle L ‘with my bare hands’.”

Moony: “What? Ya did it with gloves or something, wise guy?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, no. I know exactly what Kurumada’s referring to…”)

L’S NECK WOUND

Hayasaka: “Kurumada’s right. He couldn’t have strangled L with his hands because we didn’t find any nail marks on his neck. It’s a similar feat to Walter’s case – L was not strangled by hand, either.”

Brian: “Oh, that’s right. So, it’s pretty baseless to suspect Kurumada on being able to strangle L if that wasn’t even possible.”

Hayasaka: (“Phew…”)

Jesse: “...Maybe you punched him in the throat?”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...”

Natsuki: “I feel like this is exactly when Bojack would say something like, ‘yeah, he punched him in the throat. Because people do that. Punch people so hard in the throat they end up crushing their windpipe. Good one, Jesse.’”

Jesse: “Hahaha! God, Nat, you do such an amazing Bojack impression. What the hell? Haha.”

Saiki: “ *Good Grief. Is this comedy night or a murder trial?* ”

Jesse: “Huh? We were just messin’ around, man. No big deal.”

Saiki: “ *People like you two are what make trials longer than they should be* .”

Natsuki: “What the hell?! What’s got you so pissed off all of a sudden?”

Saiki: “ *It’s obvious. I know who the killer is* .”

Hayasaka: “Huh? You… You do?”

Brian: “This quick, too…?”

Latte: “It’s not Kurumada, is it?”

Saiki: “ *No. Just think about it. Imagine two people: a law-abiding citizen, and a criminal. Who would be the most likely to commit a crime out of the two?* ”

Kurumada: “The criminal, obviously. It’s in the name, kid.”

Saiki: “ *So, if said criminal went to prison, how likely is it for them to go on to commit another crime after they’ve been released* ?”

Latte: “Oh, I suppose that depends on how much help they were given by the prison system in terms of rehabilitation–”

Saiki: “ *It’s a very high percentage. Now, if that person was instead never caught in the first place, how likely are they to commit a crime again* ?”

Brian: “Well–”

Saiki: “ *One-hundred percent* .”

Hayasaka: “Saiki…?”

Jesse: “Argh, like, this stupid questionnaire thing you’re doin’ is damn pointless. C’mon, just tell us what you’re trying to get at already.”

Saiki: “ *Then you should already know what I’m going to say, in that case. But, you don’t, because like I said, you’re the type to drag these trials out by not catching on. I’ll have to put it simple then: someone here has already tried to commit a murder before, and by the luck of their situation, they were let off scot-free.* ”

Hayasaka: (“Does he mean without an execution…?”)

Saiki: “ *So, with the knowledge on how to carry out a murder, and having the added bonus of first-hand experience with what not to do to get caught, they can just try again. And, with L giving them the perfect opportunity, or excuse, to target someone new, they took it.* ”

Hayasaka: (“I know who he’s talking about. But, there’s something he’s missed here.”) “...Saiki. Hang on, wouldn’t there be–”

Saiki: “ *Of course I was lying right now. There isn’t just one person. There’s two.* ”

Natsuki: “...”

Jesse: “...”

Kurumada: “...I see what you’re gettin’ at now, kid.”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki… She poisoned Ena. But, she wasn’t executed because Mai killed Yuri first. And Jesse… He almost killed Bojack. But, Bojack wanted to die by his own hands, so tricked him into letting him die his way. Those two… have tried to kill someone. Yes, they have. But…”)

Latte: “They never wanted to kill their victims! Ena and Bojack – they were their friends! Both Natsuki and Jesse were in terrible situations at the time. You can’t blame them for what they did!”

Brian: “You have a point. Natsuki was manipulated by Yuri, and Jesse was drunk and overwhelmed by hallucinations. If anything, they weren’t in the right state of mind…”

Saiki: “ *And yet, they still tried to take a life. We were all in the same situations, suffered the same things as them, but did you ever even consider anything like that* ?”

Latte: “...N-No, but…”

Jesse: “...Argh!! Fuck this! And fuck you! Fuck you to hell and back! You have no idea what you’re talking about! You must be so coddled to believe any of the shit you’re spewing!”

Saiki: “ *Looks like they’re ready to speak again.* ”

Natsuki: “Seriously, Saiki, what’s wrong with you?! You’re–You’re taking what we went though, and you’re treating it like, like, fucking garbage! I’ve stayed up so many nights after killing Ena. I’ve stayed up so many nights wishing I never gave them that cupcake. Wishing you all would treat me like a killer. Wishing I was rightfully *dead* . It’s taken me so long to accept the fact you all truly wanted to support me, despite the horrible thing I did. But, now… this is what you have to say?”

Saiki: “ *...No, not really. I haven’t even begun to explain myself yet.* ”

Natsuki: “W-What?!”

Jesse: “What’s there to explain?! Go on, which of us *supposedly* killed L, then?”

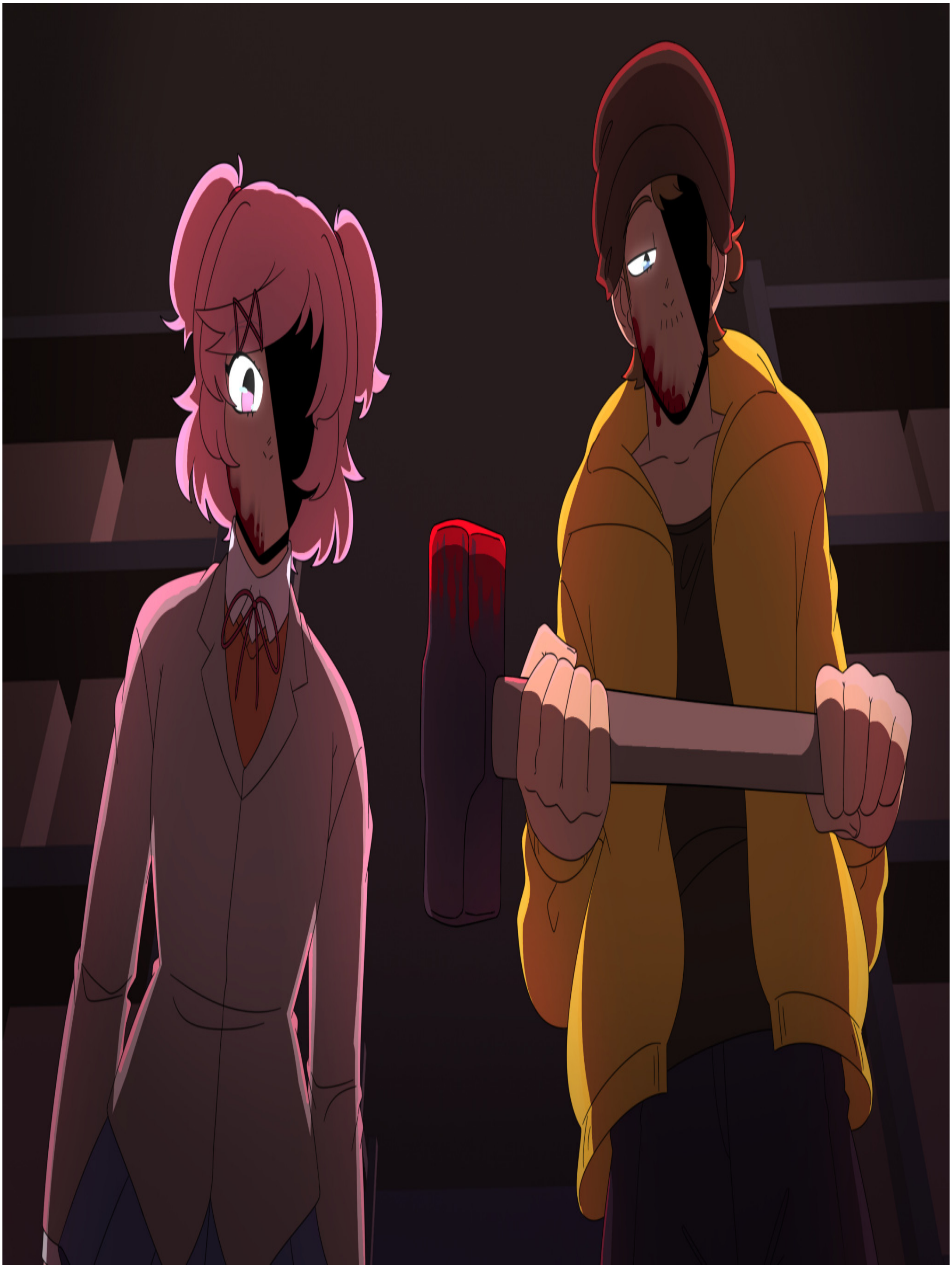
Saiki: “ *Both of you* .”

Latte: “Both of them…?”

Saiki: “ *They did it together.* ”

Hayasaka: “They… they what?”

Saiki: “ *This is what happened* .”



Saiki: “ *Jesse and Natsuki worked together to pin down, tie up, interrogate, and eventually murder L. They thought they could get away with it, too. As the only pair together the whole night during the bomb search, it gave them the perfect alibi in order to vouch for each other’s innocence* .”

Natsuki: “W…What? Is that seriously your argument? Why the hell would we even kill L? It makes no sense! That would mean our only lead on the bombs’ locations would be dead!”

Saiki: “ *That’s because it goes even deeper than just the interrogation alone. The real goal here between you two was the gift you’d receive by committing a murder: a chance to escape the island* .”

Latte: “Escape the island…? But, if a killer gets to leave the island, then the rest of us…”

Kurumada: “C’mon, that’s just ridiculous now! We’ve come so far, so why the hell would anyone wanna leave on their own and let the rest of us die?!”

Saiki: “ *But that’s exactly my point. Any one of us could be at our breaking point after so long. All these motives, murders and executions – they’re clearly too much for normal people to handle. After all, didn’t someone here say that herself* ?”

FLASHBACK

Natsuki: “ *Sniff* , I-I never wanted things to happen this way! I swear! I just–my head wasn’t thinking clearly at the time ‘cuz I was so stressed out over everything! I just wanted to leave! I thought it was the only possibility at the time to save myself! In reality I– *I wish I never even gave Ena that cupcake* –!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki did say she agreed to Yuri’s murder plan because she wanted to go home, but…”)

Natsuki: “I don’t feel that way anymore! I was just in a really horrible state of mind at the time when you all wouldn’t trust Yuri! But now, I know what I want: I want to go home with *everyone* !”

Latte: “Natsuki…!”

Brian: “Hang on… Actually, I think I know what Saiki’s talking about. Unlike in previous cases, there was technically a method this time that would allow someone to leave the island without killing the rest of us at all: the target motive.”

Moony: “What’s that? I might’a been sleeping when the motive was announced.”

Brian: “You see, by killing their target, a person could leave without us having to conduct a trial, meaning, well, no one had to face punishment. So, if Natsuki or Jesse had L as their target…”

Kurumada: “...We wouldn’t be in a trial right now. But, we are literally in a trial right now. So, clearly neither of ‘em had L as their target.”

Brian: “U-Um… T-True. But, I was just throwing it out there–”

Saiki: “ *I never once brought up that idea, you idiots.* ”

Brian: “H-Huh?”

Kurumada: “Oi!”

Jesse: “Target motive or not, asshole, you can’t just say we *both* killed L at the same time or some shit!”

Hayasaka: “You have a point. Even if you both injured L in some way, only one of you could’ve dealt the final blow on him. But… From how Saiki worded it earlier, it sounded like he was… pinning the blame on Natsuki.”

Latte: “Oh, with what he said about her claims to go home?”

Saiki: “ *Yes. I believe Natsuki was the true culprit behind the case* .”

Natsuki: “What?! Me?!”

Jesse: “I would’a been less angry if you said it was me! ‘Cuz–’Cuz this is just some total bullshit to pin this on her!”

Hayasaka: (“Actually… he’s *right* . There’s something that Saiki is missing about a weapon that would prevent Natsuki from injuring L…”)

SLEDGEHAMMER

Hayasaka: “Saiki, there’s something wrong with that claim. Natsuki is the only person who’s unable to lift the sledgehammer, let alone swing it. How could she hit L if she wasn’t even capable of using it…?”

Saiki: “ *...I never said she used the sledgehammer.* ”

Brian: “Huh? But how else would she have attacked L?”

Saiki: “ *Because it was Jesse who did it.* ”

Jesse: “What?! C’mon, you can’t be fucking serious right now!”

Latte: “But if Jesse’s the one who hit L, wouldn’t that make him the killer?”

Saiki: “ *Not if Natsuki used him as a tool.* ”

Natsuki: “A… A tool?”

Saiki: “ *Instead of attacking him herself, Natsuki could’ve used Jesse as her weapon in order to kill L.* ”

Kurumada: “Hang the hell on. Is that even allowed? That sounds damn ridiculous to me. A person can’t be a weapon!”

Monotora: “Kehe, now that’s an interesting one! Are ya asking if the true killer counts as a mastermind of sorts to the case?”

Jesse: “Like hell it would! And why would I even agree to do that?”

Saiki: “ *Because you wanted to protect Natsuki. You wouldn’t mind sacrificing yourself for her, even going as far as to give yourself up as her weapon to kill L.* ”

Brian: “T-That can’t be allowed, can it…?”

Monotora: “Mm, he does make a convincing argument though! If someone truly gives themselves up to act like a tool, shouldn’t we all treat ‘em as such?”

Latte: “Huh? No, that can’t be!”

Jesse: “Bullshit! I’d give my life up for Nat, sure, but I sure as hell wouldn’t sacrifice you guys for it! I care about you guys too! Don’t you know that?”

Natsuki: “J-Jesse…”

Hayasaka: (“Ah… This is a tough argument. Things were going much smoother before, but now… It’s true Saiki makes good points, but Jesse and Natsuki appear so sincere. If L was here, what would he say? Who would he agree with? No, does it even matter…? I’m not L, I’m… me. And, what I need to do is make sure we find the right answer… right?”)

Jesse: “Hey! Wait a ‘sec – how do you even plan to pin the crime on us when we’ve already said the sledgehammer wasn’t even used on L’s neck, smartass?!”

Brian: “Oh, that’s right. But, if it wasn’t strangulation by hand either, I’m not really sure what else was used to crush L’s windpipe.”

Hayasaka: “...Then, should we discuss that next?”

Kurumada: “If it gets us somewhere, then I’m all for it.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s right. I need to remain neutral for now. Or else, I may lose my focus on the case…”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Jesse: “The sledgehammer wasn’t used on L’s neck, so who cares if Nat couldn’t lift it or not?”

Latte: “And, as we’ve agreed the neck wound was the final blow, does that mean she isn’t the true killer behind L’s death?”

Saiki: “ *I already said Jesse was her weapon. Pay some attention, would you* ?”

Brian: “H-How blunt…”

Jesse: “But I ain’t no weapon, bitch! I’m Jesse motherfuckin’ Pinkman!”

Brian: “Also, erm, more importantly, we’ve already said hands weren’t used to strangle L.”

Kurumada: “So it’s gotta be a weapon, eh?”

Natsuki: “What kind of weapon? Was there **an object that you found that could strangle L**?”

Kurumada: “I dunno – how about that other shit you found?”

Natsuki: “I don’t really see how a multi-tool could crush someone’s windpipe…”

Kurumada: “I’m startin’ to believe anything’s possible from these past cases, kid.”

Hayasaka: (“Oh, now that she brings it up, I believe there was something that fits that description…”)

SCUFFED ROPE

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “When you mentioned strangulation by object, Natsuki, I realised there was something like that at the scene: rope.”

Latte: “Rope? Oh, are you talking about that extra rope we found behind L’s chair?”

Hayasaka: “Yes. If you recall, there was a clear fray in the middle of that rope. And, if someone were to be strangled with rope, the pressure from rubbing it against the skin would make it fray, wouldn’t it?”

Brian: “Ah! Which would look just like the fray we saw.”

Kurumada: “Oh, I get it now. So the sledgehammer was used to beat L’s abdomen, but this rope was used to strangle him.”

Jesse: “See, yo? The rope was used to kill L in the end!”

Saiki: “ *...And? What’s stopping Natsuki from using the rope? Even if she claims to be too weak to strangle L, the idea she just used you to do it instead still holds up* .”

Natsuki: “C-Come on…!”

Brian: “I… Guess you have a point.”

Hayasaka: (“...The more Saiki explains it, the more I see it taking shape in my mind. We don’t have much else we can argue against it, do we? Then… were Natsuki and Jesse really working together to kill L? Were those two the ones to knock me unconscious? I can see why it’d make sense: since the two were supposed to be searching the first island that night, the only logical route would be to take me back with them and place me somewhere on the island, like the beach. I’m… rather surprised they didn’t bother just killing me as well. Then again, I suppose two bodies would’ve left more evidence behind than they would’ve liked.”)

Saiki: “*... I don’t want to be in this position, you know? I don’t want to be convicting two allies of murder. But, in terms of experience and motivation, those two are the only choice.* ”

Natsuki: “Go screw yourself with your sorry excuses, Saiki.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Latte: “Ah… *sob* … I don’t want to vote for them! I don’t want to look at Natsuki and Jesse as killers, despite what they’ve done before! My heart can’t accept such a thing. I want to believe in them – believe they wouldn't harm L. They wouldn't tie him up, and they wouldn't hit him and strangle him!"

Kurumada: "Damnit! If ya accusations weren't so harsh, we wouldn't have to feel so torn!"

Hayasaka: ("... *Hang on* . There's something off about what Latte said. That detail…") "...Hey, Saiki. Do you mind if you run through your theory once more? I just want to check something."

Saiki: " *...Alright* ."

NON-STOP DEBATE

Saiki: " *Like I said, Natsuki and Jesse worked together to tie up and interrogate L.* "

Brian: "But, only one of them killed L in the end…"

Kurumada: "And accordin' to you, Natsuki used Jesse as a tool."

Saiki: " *Yes. Natsuki had Jesse* ***hit L with the sledgehammer after tying him up*** *in order to torture him for answers about the bombs. And, when he refused to talk, Natsuki made Jesse strangle L to death with rope* ."

Latte: "But… I just can't see Natsuki doing something so horrible after what she had regretted before!"

Saiki: " *She wouldn't have to feel so bad about it as she wasn't the one carrying out the blows* ."

Natsuki: "Stop making things up already! I-I didn't do *anything* !"

Jesse: "Me neither, jackass!"

Hayasaka: ("...I see now. I can clearly pick out the part that's wrong here.")

ROPE AROUND L

Hayasaka: ("This is it!")

BREAK

Hayasaka: "Wait, Saiki. Something doesn't add up with what you said. If Jesse struck L with the sledgehammer while he was tied up, wouldn't the rope be stained in as much blood as his shirt was?"

Brian: "Actually, thinking back on it… The rope itself was relatively clean, huh? It only had a bit of blood on it."

Hayasaka: "This can only mean L's abdomen wound was dealt *before* he was tied up, doesn't it?"

Saiki: "..."

Natsuki: "Wait, what? How can that be possible? I thought L was only attacked once he was tied up!"

Latte: "Does that mean that L's abdomen wound was how he was subdued in the first place?"

Kurumada: "'Prolly not. To swing a whole ass sledgehammer takes some time n' strength to do. Ain't really the best way to sneak up on someone."

Hayasaka: "Therefore, if L was attacked before he was tied up, this interrogation theory…"

Jesse: “It’s startin’ to show some cracks, *Mr. Genius* .”

Saiki: “*... So what? Even if it does, it doesn’t discredit either Natsuki or Jesse as the killers.* ”

Brian: “But it kind of does, doesn’t it?”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “...Do you have something, Brian?”

Brian: “I think so. I mean, to even get to L in the storage room, both Jesse and Natsuki would need to travel to the fifth island, right? But, weren’t they all the way on the other side of Island Nesos on the first island last night?”

Natsuki: “Hey, that’s right! There’s no way it would’ve been possible for us to walk through the other islands without getting caught, because everyone else would’ve been on them searching for the bombs!”

Saiki: “ *Really? That’s easy. The two could’ve just snuck past any island as long as the person currently searching it was inside a building* .”

Kurumada: “What, like you did?”

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “Huh? What’re you talking about, Kurumada?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, I understand what he’s trying to say.”) “That can be explained. But, I just want to make sure of something, so let me pose this small question: where was everyone at the time of the bomb search?”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Jesse: “The bomb search? Hell, that’s an easy one, man. You know me n’ Nat were looking around the first island.”

Kurumada: “I was on the second island. I gotta say, you guys really did trash the stage bar.”

Natsuki: “I told you, you shouldn’t ever go back there…”

Latte: “I took the third island! Moony even gave a helping hand with the very high places!”

Moony: “Call me the ultimate search-a-thon! …Wait, no! I want a cooler name!”

Saiki: “ *...I already told you* ***I was searching the fourth island*** .”

Brian: “And that left me and Hayasaka, a-and L, at the fifth island.”

Saiki: “ *That’s all the accounts. But, I don’t see a problem. Like I said, those two could just sneak past us to the fifth island* .”

Jesse: “For someone usually so quiet, you’re really ripping into us for no reason, jerkward!”

Hayasaka: (“...Why is he leaving out that part? He wasn’t just there…”)

NATSUKI’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “S-Saiki… Yes, you were originally searching the fourth island, but you had gone to the first island to continue your search there. You even joined up with Natsuki and Jesse for the rest of the night, too.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, so if Saiki was with Jesse and Natsuki, how the hell could those two have gone to the fifth island?”

Saiki: “...”

Natsuki: “...So?”

Saiki: “*... Huff. You do realise a time of death was not stated for L, don’t you? Natsuki and Jesse could’ve killed L earlier on, and then met up with me after they returned to the first island* .”

Brian: “...Um, something is still off with that.”

Saiki: “ *And why should I listen to your ideas* ?”

Brian: “B-Because it’s important to the case!”

Hayasaka: “...No, I believe I know what Brian means.”

BRIAN’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: “This is less to do with getting to the fifth island, and more so getting upstairs to the storage room at Nesos HQ. However, Brian, who was resting in the infirmary at the time, only ever heard three pairs of footsteps walk past the third floor.”

Brian: “Yeah, just like Hayasaka said! The first footsteps had to have been L’s, since they were very early on in the evening. But, the next two pairs of footsteps definitely belonged to Hayasaka, as I heard them before and after he came to check on me.”

Latte: “So, if Natsuki and Jesse had gone to Nesos HQ, you would’ve heard two more pairs of footsteps–ah, double that to account for coming down the stairs, too.”

Brian: “But, I didn’t.”

Saiki: “*... So what you’re saying is, no one climbed the stairs to meet L* ?”

Hayasaka: (“...Ah, we know that, but… Wait, *what* ?”)

Kurumada: “Shit, we’ve come back to this problem. Hey, uh, maybe there was some kinda trick? What if the killer climbed up the stair railings, or jumped up a few steps at a time?”

Brian: “M-Maybe we should just move on from that for now. We can come back to it later if we can’t answer it at this time, right?”

Kurumada: “Then what do you s’pose we *can* answer?”

Brian: “Well… There’s something else I’m confused about. When we confirmed L’s abdomen wound came before he was tied up, you said it was unlikely for the sledgehammer to be used for a surprise attack. But then, just what *did* cause that wound?”

Jesse: “Shit, man, another weapon problem? What’s up with this damn case?”

Hayasaka: (“No matter how we look at it, Brian’s right. Was there something else in the storage room so blunt to have caused such damage to L’s abdomen?”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Latte: “If the sledgehammer wasn’t used to hit L, then what was?”

Natsuki: “We’re kind of running out of weapons here, y’know?”

Brian: “Oh, then if it’s not a physical weapon, could it have been part of the storage room itself? Like with the sink in Retsuko’s case, and the filing cabinet in Bojack’s case…”

Jesse: “Those were kinda different, yo. That shit was used to hit their heads, not down in their guts!”

Latte: “If you think about it, wasn’t Retsuko the smallest and Bojack the tallest? And, those individual objects matched their height too!”

Natsuki: “I don’t really see how that has any relevance to L…”

Kurumada: “Was there nothin’ that **left evidence of bein’ used to cause a similar damage to L** that wasn’t the sledgehammer? I swore me n’ Hayasaka looked everywhere around that damn room!”

Moony: “Are we allowed to go back and check? Actually, while I’m there, mind if I go grab a few snacks for the road?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, now that he mentions it, there was something strange…”)

KNOCKED OVER STORAGE SHELF

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, wasn’t there something we found in the storage room? That knocked over shelf? And, recalling the state it was in, it suffered a similar damaged state to L’s abdomen wound.”

Jesse: “Wait, so are you sayin’ it was possible that L got knocked back into that shelf?”

Kurumada: “Hey, that makes sense, don’t it? After all, that shelf had been knocked back so damn hard it made the brick wall behind it crack.”

Latte: “Ah, so if a person was knocked back with the same type of force, it would’ve caused quite an injury…!”

Natsuki: “Eh? Seriously? How do we even know that’s true?”

Brian: “...L’s back.”

Natsuki: “His… back?”

Brian: “U-Um, what I meant to say was that the bruise on his back was much darker than it was on his front. So, that probably means the impact of the injury first came through his back, and the bruise then spread to his front. For that to happen, he must’ve been pushed back into the shelf from his front.”

Saiki: “ *But if you’re saying L was pushed from his front, how did he not see the killer coming for him* ?”

Jesse: “Also, how did the killer cause *that* much damage to the wall just from knocking L back into the shelf? I mean, I don’t mean to bring up the obvious guy again, but…”

Kurumada: “Then don’t. ‘Cuz that still doesn’t answer our other question, remember? We still dunno how the killer even got to the storage room without Brian hearin’ ‘em from the stairs.”

Natsuki: “Great, now we’re stuck with two problems. First, the missing killer climbing the stairs. And now, this mysteriously superhuman strength the killer obtained to knock L back into the shelf.”

Kurumada: “It’s like this killer is a fuckin’ magician or something.”

Monotora: “We were gonna have an Ultimate Magician, but we fired him.”

Kurumada: “Eh, who?”

Monotora: “Someone who loved to disappear. You know, your dad!”

Kurumada: “What the hell?! Now you’re just making shit up, you asshole!”

Monotora: “Gahaha! Oh, but I suppose you bastards *are* gettin’ real close to an answer, it appears. It’s written all over their face~”

Brian: “W-Who’s face?”

Hayasaka: “...”

…

Hayasaka: (“...I should’ve seen it from the beginning. It was all building up in the back of my mind, but I refused to let it surface. But now, this trial only provided more and more foundation towards it. The relentless accusation. The strange migration during the bomb search. The inhuman mysteries left behind. The fact they were the first person to find me at the beach this morning. It all shouldn’t be explainable. It really shouldn’t. But, unfortunately, it is.”)

…

Hayasaka: (“Because someone here is capable of all of it, and more.”)

…

Hayasaka: “...T-This was possible. And, there’s someone here who could have made it so.”

Latte: “Huh? Who…?”

SELECT SOMEONE

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “...U-Um…”

Moony: “I feel like a block of text just told you to do something really important, yaknow?”

Hayasaka: (“...What… What am I doing? What the *hell* am I doing?”)

…

Hayasaka: (“Am I… Am I really going to expose *Saiki’s powers* ?”)

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“No, that’s not what I want to ask myself. No… Am I really going to convict Saiki as the *killer* ?”)

Saiki: “...?”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t do that. I can’t out Saiki’s secret. Of course I can recall all the amazing things he’s capable of, and how they all fit too, too perfectly into the pieces of the puzzle. Yet, despite all of that, what kind of person would I be to just throw out all of Saiki’s trust in me for the sake of a case? For goodness sake he’s never even told anyone outside of his immediate family, Hayasaka. No… Even if it’s true, why should *I* have the right to say anything…?”)

…

Hayasaka: (“Because… Because I know exactly what’ll happen if I open my mouth. If I try to convict another person. A person I hold dear. The fate he’ll be subjected to. It’s already happened to Mai by my own words, hasn’t it?”)

‘A cycle sprouts: people die, the rest of us become more traumatised and depressed, repeating until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.’

Hayasaka: (“...I’m not even going to think about letting that happen to Saiki.”)

Saiki: “...”

Jesse: “...Uh, Mr. Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “...I-I’m sorry. It was nothing. I had it wrong. I–”

Saiki: “ *I have psychic powers* .”

Hayasaka: “ *Huh…* ?”

Brian: “You, erm, you what now?”

Kurumada: “What the hell are you talking about? Don’t tell me you’re trying to roleplay at a time like this, damn kid.”

Hayasaka: (“Saiki, what’re you doing…? No, no, stop it… Stop it…”)

Saiki: “ *...It’s true. I was born with psychic abilities.* ”

Jesse: “Does that mean, like, you can fly, n’ teleport, n’ bend spoons with your mind…?”

Saiki: “ *Sigh. I suppose that’s some of them* .”

Natsuki: “ *Some* ?!”

Kurumada: “Even if ya wanna, uh, claim all of that, what the hell does that have to do with anything at all?”

Brian: “Wait… No. This… This answers our problems, doesn’t it? With the stairs, and the shelf…”

Natsuki: “You mean… The reason you didn’t hear anyone climb the stairs is because they were actually invisible or something?”

Jesse: “And, like, if a normal person couldn’t knock someone back into that wall with insane strength, then it had to be someone with actual superhuman strength?”

Brian: “Y…Yeah. And, well, it’s not just that. There are a few other more, erm, grounded things that make Saiki look suspicious. Take the bomb search, for example. How he met up with Natsuki and Jesse was strange, wasn’t it?”

Kurumada: “Now that ya mention it again, it does kinda sound like he was doin’ it to give himself an alibi. And, ‘cuz he was meant to be searchin’ the fourth island at the time, given it’s right next to the fifth island, he wouldn't have to worry about bein' caught travelling there."

Saiki: " *...And one more thing. Right, Hayasaka* ?"

Hayasaka: "W…What? M-Me…?"

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "...I-It was what you said before…"

FLASHBACK

Saiki: "*... So what you're saying is, no one climbed the stairs to meet L* ?"

Hayasaka: ("...Ah, we know that, but… Wait, *what* ?")

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: "You said 'meet' with L, instead of something like 'tie up' or 'interrogate'. It was… almost as if you… knew something we didn't…"

Saiki: "..."

Natsuki: "Wait, so, all that time you were on me and Jesse's case trying to frame us for the murder, you're saying it was just a cover-up of something this entire time?"

Saiki: " *...It's true. You two didn't do anything at all.* "

Jesse: “But, why? What the hell did you do?”

Saiki: “ *There was no interrogation. I went to see L myself* .”

Hayasaka: (“No…”)

Saiki: “ *And, I–* ”

Latte: “Hahahaha!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? Latte…?”

Latte: “Ahaha! Ah, I’m sorry Saiki, haha. I couldn’t help but laugh at that. Oh dear… I will admit, it was a very lovely attempt on your end to ease our nerves.”

Saiki: “...?”

Hayasaka: “Um… What’re you talking about…?”

Latte: “You don’t have powers, silly. If you did, I would know. After all, I have powers too. And I’ve been pretty open with that fact: I can cast spells using my spoon – I mean, I teach that stuff for a living! Haha.”

Moony: “You sure are findin’ this hilarious. Is this the kinda comedy people in your world are into? How rambunctious, lady.”

Latte: “All I’m saying is, if Saiki truly had powers as well, I would’ve eventually picked up on that fact myself.”

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “Aw, Saiki, I know you were just trying to help everyone out by pretending you have powers to explain away the mysteries. You thought it would mean no one would get hurt by being suspected any longer. But, even so, I’d rather nobody got hurt. That includes you too, Saiki.”

Kurumada: “I guess I can see where ya comin’ from, Latte. The kid kinda just came outta nowhere with it.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, and it’s not like we’ve seen proof Saiki has any powers.”

Hayasaka: (“...It’s so easy to think that. I would’ve believed it myself if I didn’t know the truth. But… Saiki can, and Saiki will prove he has…”)

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Saiki? He’s not… doing anything. He appears reluctant. Does he not want to… *Oh* . Ah, no, no, this–this is good, isn’t it? He shouldn’t prove it at all. Because, if he does…”)

‘Until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.’

Hayasaka: (“...It’ll only push us both further into the horrible, horrible truth. So, if Saiki wants to back down, I will too.”)

TUG

Hayasaka: (“Huh? My sleeve…”)

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“ *Saiki* …? Why are you looking at me like that? Why… Oh, I see. He wants *me* to prove it. That’s… Saiki, no, you really *do* want them to know, don’t you…?”)

Saiki: (“ *I’ll explain myself later. Please, I want your help. That’s all I ask for* .”)

Hayasaka: (“Ah…! That voice in my head, it’s…”)

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...I can see him wince in pain so clearly it almost wants to make me cry.”)

…

Hayasaka: “...No. Saiki *does* have psychic powers.”

Latte: “Hayasaka, dear, it’s okay. You don’t have to play along with him.”

Hayasaka: “I’m–I’m not. I’m being completely serious.”

Latte: “...Are you sure? Can you even prove such a thing?”

Saiki: “ *He can. Because it’s true* .”

Hayasaka: (“Maybe… Saiki will explain himself properly – prove this is all a misunderstanding. After all, just because he was involved, doesn’t mean he was the one to…”)

BALANCE BATTLE

Latte: “If Saiki had powers, why hasn’t he used them before?”

Saiki: “ *I can’t use my powers often, but that doesn’t mean I haven’t used them* .”

DENY LATTE

Hayasaka: “He has used them before: I’ve personally seen him disappear one night after the second trial.”

Latte: “But you saw him alone, right? Are you sure your mind wasn’t playing tricks on you?”

Saiki: “ *I’ve used my powers in front of others, not just Hayasaka* .”

AFFIRM SAIKI

Hayasaka: “Saiki had told us no one had presently checked the beach before we found Walter’s body. How else would you explain such a phenomenon when he was still at the hotel with us?”

Latte: “Well… It could have been a lucky guess! Or he could’ve used deduction by watching where the other group ran off to!”

Saiki: “ *I’ve done things that would be impossible for me to know* .”

AFFIRM SAIKI

Hayasaka: “It’s true! Saiki had guided Brian to safety through the vents during the vent experiment by telling him which direction to go. We had no map of the vents, so how would Saiki physically know the right path?”

Latte: “Another lucky guess! Tell me something impossible for Saiki to have done! Something luck couldn’t have touched!”

Saiki: “ *I don’t rely on luck. You’re thinking too hard about this so you can play denial* .”

AFFIRM LATTE

Hayasaka: “Saiki… Saiki knocked a knife out of my hands far from where I stood to prevent me from harming myself! That has nothing to do with luck – it was purely impossible!”

BREAK

Latte: “...Wh… *Huh* ? Hayasaka… What did you just say…?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...So, that’s what ya meant before when you said Saiki had stepped in to stop you.”

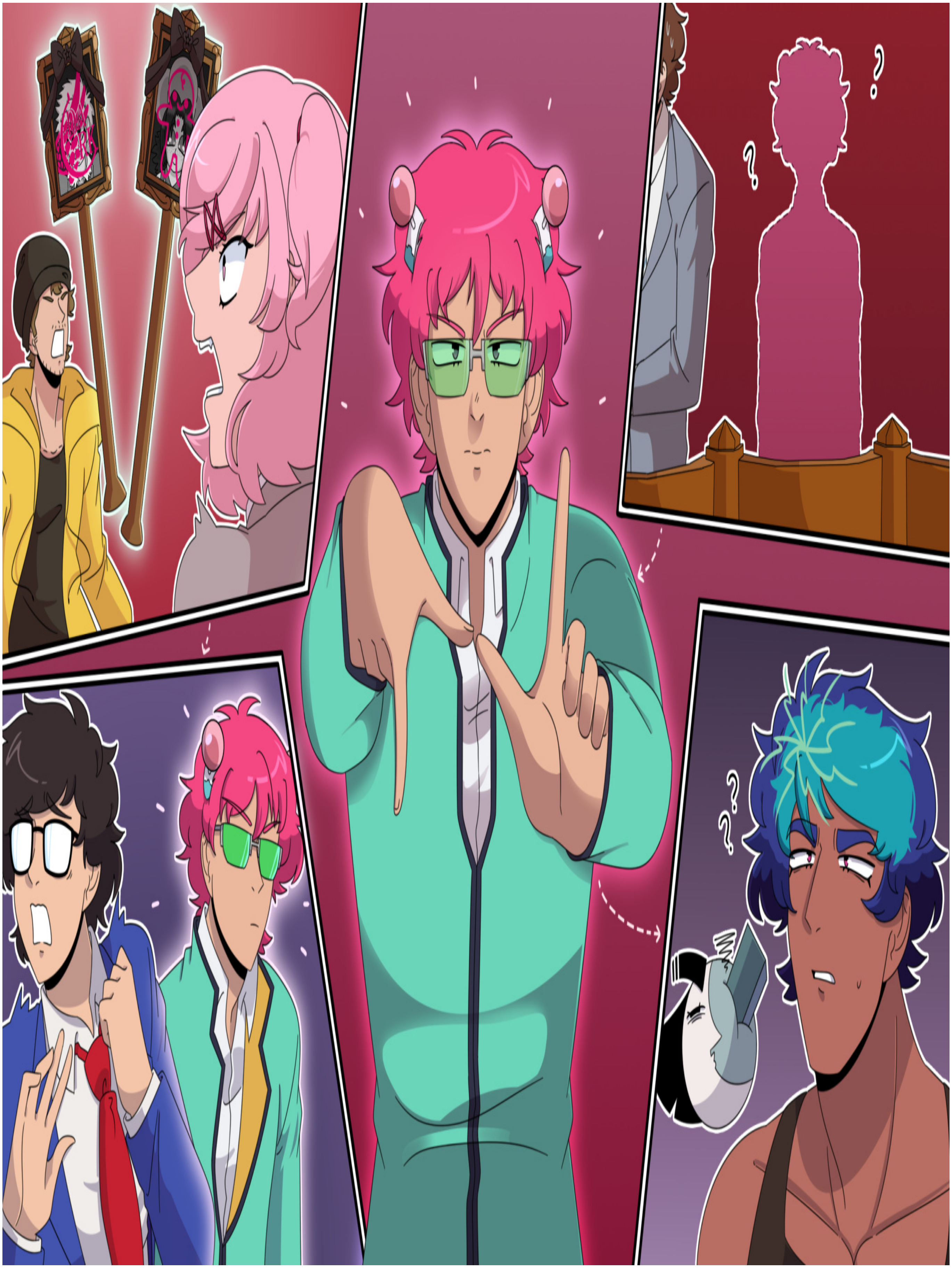
Brian: “H-Hayasaka…”

Saiki: “ *Just drop what he said for now. Everyone, please watch me* .”

Natsuki: “Huh? Watch what–”

SWOOSH

Natsuki: “W-What the *hell* ?!”



Jesse: “Yo, what the shit?! The portraits… they’re levitating?!”

BANG

Brian: “Was… Was that Nesos’ doing…? B-Because I don’t–”

FWIP

Brian: “AH! S-S-Saiki?!”

Jesse: “How the hell did you appear between us?!”

FWIP

Kurumada: “Where… Where the hell did he go now?!”

POP

Saiki: “...!!”

Kurumada: “What kinda pose is that…?”

Moony: “Alright, you’re definitely just trying to show off now.”

Hayasaka: (“Even though I’m seeing it all again, I’m still just as baffled as before.”)

Natsuki: “W-Wh… What was that…? Was that… real…?”

Monotora: “Kyehehehe! Hm? Didn’t ya know? Did he not spill it before? Kusuo Saiki is the *Ultimate Psychic* !”

Brian: “ *Oh okay* … S-So maybe he was telling the truth. And here I thought my talent was the strangest one…”

Kurumada: “Gh… My damn head hurts. What the hell is goin’ on anymore?”

Jesse: “Jesus, I had no idea I was in the presence of a psychic this whole time. Although, Saiki… psychic… Now that I’m thinkin’ about it…”

Natsuki: “W-Well, I guess I always found it weird how he never opened his mouth when he talks…”

Saiki: “*... Gh...* !”

Hayasaka: “Ah! S-Saiki…!”

Latte: “Saiki…! Why’re you holding yourself like that? Are you alright?!”

Hayasaka: “Y-You see, ah, if Saiki overexerts himself with his powers, it’ll cause his body great pain.”

Saiki: “ *It’s only been this way since I woke up on the island* …”

Kurumada: “Wait, you knew about this, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “That is… I-I’ve only known about his powers for a few days after Saiki told me himself.”

Brian: “But, from what Monotora said, it sounds like Nesos has known about it this whole time.”

Saiki: “ *I guess you have no choice but to believe me now, don’t you* ?”

Latte: “...”

Kurumada: “Huh? Why ain’t you saying anything…?”

Hayasaka: “...I believe it’s because Latte had been denying the truth just as much as I was.”

Jesse: “So like, can we get an explanation now?”

Saiki: “ *What I did just now... It was my explanation* .”

Natsuki: “Huh? What do you mean by that?”

Brian: “Oh, I see. The powers Saiki just showed us *was* proof he was capable of the impossible feats we brought up before. When he turned invisible, it showed he could’ve used it to walk up the stairs without me hearing him. And, when he lifted up the portraits without touching them, it proved he could do the same to L to knock him back into the shelf.”

Saiki: “ *It was never a ‘superhuman strength’ push at all. It was just me using telekinesis* .”

Kurumada: “Yeah, well we didn’t think we had a damn psychic with us.”

Hayasaka: “But, Saiki… You’re going to tell us, right? Why you went to see L?”

Jesse: “And what the hell caused you to get so violent with him, man?”

Saiki: “ *Sigh… I’ll explain myself already* .”

Latte: “...”

Saiki: “ *I was always sick of L’s antics. But, this bomb threat had just crossed a line. I made a vow that I was going to use my powers more often to help the group after I told Hayasaka about them, so I decided I needed to confront L about his ridiculous plan. Once everyone had split up to go search for the bombs, I didn’t stick around on the fourth island for long. I went to Nesos HQ on the next island over, and used my clairvoyance to find where L was. I turned invisible to climb the stairs, as I knew I’d have to sneak past Brian on the 3rd floor. When I arrived at the storage room, L, as expected, assumed I was there to confess I was the so-called traitor* .”

FLASHBACK

L: “Hm… This was a little unexpected. Although, I didn’t think it was impossible.”

Saiki: “ *Shut up. I’m not here to confess anything* .”

L: “No? Then, I’m curious. Why are you here, Saiki? And more importantly, how did you find me?”

Saiki: “ *Tell me where the bombs are.* ”

L: “The bombs? Hm, I wonder where they could be, indeed.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t play dumb. You’re endangering everyone’s lives over a traitor that you don’t know even exists. That traitor has been your theory alone this entire time* .”

L: “Oh, no. I know a traitor does exist, Saiki.”

Saiki: “ *I gave you one chance to confess. If you continue to screw around, I’ll–* ”

L: “Hm, yes, actually, now that you’re here, I’d like to finally test it out.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t cut me off, I’m trying to –*”

L: “Say, Saiki. Should I tell you the location of one of the bombs?”

Saiki: “ *What…* ?”

L: “This one is quite ironic, mind you.”

L: “Hayasaka’s hotel room.”

Saiki: “...!”

L: “I couldn’t resist myself. Although he’s rather intelligent, he’s quite the predictable man. I believe someone like him would return to such a place, even if he feels doubt. Ah, I believe he may be back there any moment. It would be a shame if the bomb went off prematurely, now, wouldn’t it–”

CRASH

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“Ah, so *that* was the crashing sound I heard back then. *But…* ”)

Saiki: “ *The moment I heard where he hid the bomb, I didn’t care what L said afterwards. I had sent him flying back into the storage shelf behind before I even realised it. But, I miscalculated the strength of the attack. Since I haven’t been using my powers as often as I used to before the death game, I’ve become a bit unstable with them* .”

Kurumada: “That sounds like you’re just coverin’ the real fact that you were in an emotional state. After all, if *I* heard where that bastard hid that bomb right then, I would’a gone berserk too.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s right. L supposedly placed one in my room. *Ah* , my room? Oh god – no, could that have been possible? How could he have even gotten inside my room? I always keep it locked, right?”)

Brian: “What happened next, after L was knocked into the shelf?”

Saiki: “ *I… I just watched his lifeless body longer than I should have* .”

Latte: “Oh, oh goodness…”

Saiki: “ *Although, what I didn’t expect to hear next was someone climbing the stairs and walking towards the storage room. I panicked, and instinctively teleported away. But, I didn’t think about where I would end up, and that’s when I realised I was on the first island. I soon ran into Jesse and Natsuki, so I had to make up an excuse as to what I was doing there* .”

Hayasaka: (“I have a small feeling I know why he subconsciously teleported there. If there really was a bomb in my hotel room, he probably wanted to double check if it was true…”)

Brian: “Wait, did you just say you heard someone climb upstairs to the storage room?”

Hayasaka: (“Ah…!”)

Latte: “... *Sniff* … A-Ah… No…”

Natsuki: “L-Latte…!”

Latte: “Please! I’m sleeping! I wish I was just sleeping right now! This is all a bad dream, surely…!”

Kurumada: “Damnit…!”

Hayasaka: (“I understand why this is so hard for Latte to bear. Having to watch not just another student be accused of murder, but the one that was closest to Kaidou…”)

…

Hayasaka: (“... *Wait.* ”) “...S-Saiki? But, L *did* get up, didn’t he?”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “He did get up, Saiki. C-Come on. Tell us. Tell me.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “ *Ah… N-No* …”

Saiki: “*... I’m sorry for keeping quiet for so long. I’m sorry for accusing Natsuki and Jesse. I’m sorry I… couldn’t help everyone in the end. Because… I was the one who did it. I was the one who killed L* .”

Hayasaka: (“Haah… No. It’s not real… is it? My heart… is sinking. Everything is so cold…”)

Kurumada: “Argh! It’s not fair! None of this shit is fair! These accidents that end up killing people shouldn’t be happening in the first place if Nesos weren’t such fuckin’ bastards to let ‘em happen!”

Saiki: “ *This has nothing to do with Nesos. They had no influence over what I did* .”

Natsuki: “Still, you only did it because of the crappy thing L said to you!”

Saiki: “ *I shouldn’t have let it get to me. It was solely my fault. If anything, we need to end this now.* ”

Hayasaka: “E-End this…?”

Brian: “Saiki… Are you sure you want things to end this way? What you’ve said doesn’t explain how L’s windpipe was crushed, or why he was even tied up…”

Saiki: “ *All of that doesn’t matter. From what I did, no one would be able to withstand it, not even someone like L. If you keep denying the truth, you’re all going to end up killing yourselves* .”

Latte: “Ah… *sob* …”

Saiki: “ *Monotora. Start the vote immediately. Mulling around now will only weaken the resolve* .”

Brian: “Huh? W-Wait! No, don’t start anything…!”

Monotora: “So, it ain’t just before, demanin’ to come down here. Now you’re even telling me to begin the vote? I’ll say, for a mutey, you sure are pushy. Then again, it could be fun to start it now. And, s’not like I’m gonna listen to Brian of all people for any objections, kehe.”

Brian: “W-What…?!”

Jesse: “I… I guess we can’t really deny that Saiki did all that shit, ‘specially after he’s shown us his powers first hand…”

Hayasaka: (“Saiki is… guilty. Too guilty over what he did. He doesn’t even want to give us time to think about it.”)

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...Even if I don’t want to see him as the killer.”)

Monotora: “Now then, please turn your attention to your tablets as I readily await your votes on who you think the killer is!”

Hayasaka: (“...Even if there’s still unexplained mysteries.”)

Monotora: “Will you be right on the money? Or will you go home with nothing but a broken skull and mushy organs? Let’s find out! Kehehe~”

Hayasaka: (“...Even if I don’t know who knocked me unconscious.”)

…

Hayasaka: (“ *...Even if it makes no sense for Saiki to be the killer.* ”)

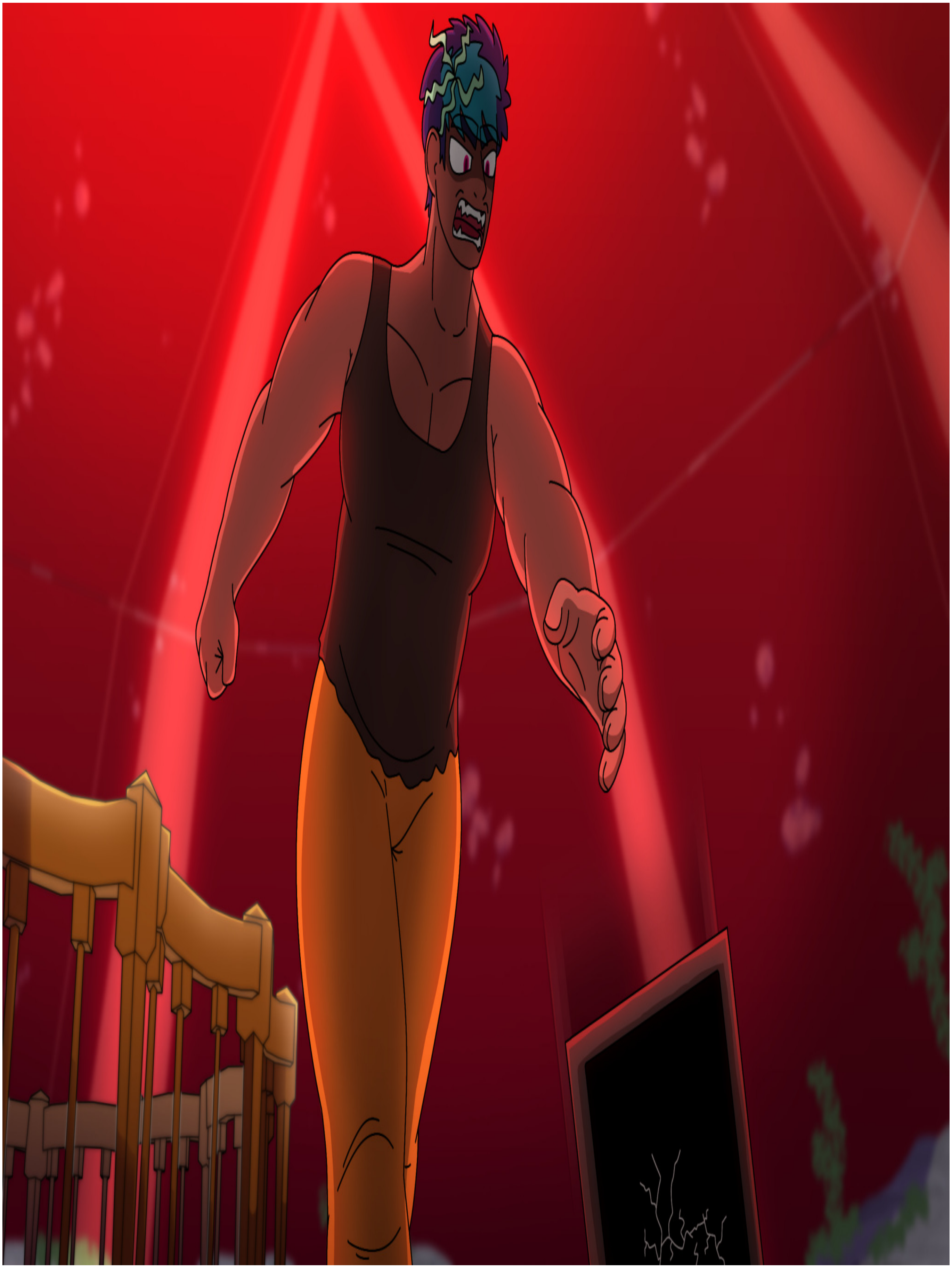
VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: E–

???: “ *ARGH* !”

CRASH

Hayasaka: “... *Huh* ?”



Kurumada: “ *Huff… Huff* …!”

Hayasaka: “K– *Kurumada* …?!”

Kurumada: “I *ain’t* votin’ yet, goddamnit!! I’ve never been so unsatisfied in my life! Oi, *you* !”

Saiki: “...?”

Kurumada: “Are ya really okay with *dying* right now?!”

Saiki: “...”

Natsuki: “What the hell?! Have you gone freaking insane or something, Kurumada?!”

Monotora: “He better not have. Refusal to vote will result in ya own punishment.”

Kurumada: “Well I *can’t* physically vote no more! The screen’s cracked to shit – so you can go fuck yourself!”

Jesse: “Hell yeah! C’mon, lemme break mine next–!”

Brian: “S-Stop! There’s no point in breaking two tablets in a row…! O-One is enough for the protest, alright?”

Kurumada: “C’mon, kid, answer me! Are you seriously ready to give up on your life like a coward when no one around ya even wants you to?!”

Saiki: “ *...There’s no point in arguing the truth* –”

Kurumada: “Screw your truth!! We want the *whole* truth! What makes you think endin’ this now is gonna make this any easier? The least you can do is to stay here, damnit, and let us uncover the rest of this case! Are you gonna let it end like this?”

Saiki: “...”

Kurumada: “Are you?!”

Saiki: “*... No. I don’t want things to end here. But, I don’t want to continue to feel this way.* ”

Kurumada: “And you don’t have to. Because you got someone right next to ya who’s gonna make this easy. Ain’t that right, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“*... Ah* ! I realised it – what Kurumada’s doing…! He’s buying us more time to prove Saiki’s innocence. That’s right, even *he* knows about the unsolved mystery of the person who knocked me unconscious, so he must know this isn’t over yet either.”) “Y-Yes, of course…! I want to figure out the rest of the mystery together.”

Latte: “ *Sniff* … Oh, Kurumada. You’re such a selfless sweetheart! Mai would be so proud to see you right now!”

Kurumada: “H-Hey! I haven’t done nothin’, really! S’not like I ever said Saiki *ain’t* the killer now, did I?”

Monotora: “Gahaha! Oh? So, even though everyone agrees on the killer, they don’t want to end the trial just yet? …Eh, don’t care.”

Brian: “Huh? You… don’t care? You’re not going to get mad at us for stopping the vote again…?”

Monotora: “Mm, nah. I’m personally just here to watch the calamities at this point. If Nesos got a problem, then I’ll leave it to them to jump in.”

Moony: “I bet you think this is some sorta reality TV show! Well, it’s not, because I’m not even the main star!”

Hayasaka: (“I’m just thankful Monotora hasn’t caught wind of our true intentions.”)

Jesse: “So, does this mean we’re going back to the case?”

Natsuki: “Alright, but after all of that, I’ve completely forgotten what we were even talking about before.”

Hayasaka: “I believe… Ah, that’s right. Saiki had used invisibility to climb the stairs to the storage room without being heard by Brian. Then, he had knocked L back into a shelf, which caused L’s abdomen wound and the crack in the wall.”

Saiki: “ *After that, I teleported to the first island where I ran into Jesse and Natsuki* .”

Brian: “And you said you teleported away because you heard someone walk into the storage room?”

Saiki: “ *Mhm* .”

Brian: “But… how could that have been possible?”

Latte: “Ah, that’s true. Saiki could get away with climbing the stairs due to his invisibility, but that wouldn’t be possible for anyone else without being caught.”

Brian: “So how did someone else pass by without me hearing them?”

Jesse: “Yo, what if they didn’t come from downstairs, but *upstairs* ?”

Natsuki: “Eh? But the only people who have access to the upstairs are the people working in Nesos, right?”

Jesse: “Exactly! So it’s gotta be one of those guys, ain’t it?”

Hayasaka: (“...I know that isn’t the case at all. But…”)

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, that look… It’s telling me things will be alright.”) “A-Actually, there is… one possible person that could’ve walked up those stairs. And you heard them do so, Brian.”

Brian: “Huh? W-Wait… Are you talking about yourself, Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...So, you didn’t walk down the stairs when you left me, you actually walked *up* .”

Latte: “Wait, what’re you saying, Hayasaka? Why were you the one to walk upstairs to the storage room?”

Hayasaka: “Please hear me out. After I left Brian in the infirmary, I heard a loud crash come from the floor above, which was most likely when Saiki had knocked L back into the shelf. I decided to investigate, but I couldn’t see anyone at first when I walked inside the storage room.”

Saiki: “ *That was about when I teleported away. And since L was further inside the room, you wouldn’t be able to see him at the entrance* .”

Hayasaka: “Yes, but not long after, I had suddenly lost consciousness from being knocked out. I didn’t wake up until the morning, where I had found myself on the first island’s beach. Saiki had found me first with his clairvoyance.”

Brian: “Gosh, that… all sounds pretty crazy.”

Jesse: “Like a whole ass horror movie, man.”

Latte: “Oh my, that sounds a little similar to how I was knocked out in the third case by Yuri.”

Natsuki: “So why didn’t you say that before?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, uh…”

Natsuki: “I’m not… trying to pose anything, I swear. It’s just… that sounds pretty important to the case.”

Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m sorry. I was nervous to speak up about it beforehand.”

Monotora: “What happened to all that trust? That bond you said you had? If you really did trust ‘em, why keep ya trap sealed, Dr. Deceptive?”

Jesse: “I mean, I guess it’s kinda important to mention you were at the literal scene of the crime.”

Moony: “Kinda makes you look suspicious if you have nothing to hide. Like, speak up, or stay forever guilty.”

Kurumada: “Oi, just shut it, will ya?! This is exactly why Hayasaka didn’t wanna speak up about it! Ya get given one seed of doubt and you’ve already grown a garden of suspicion!”

Monotora: “How poetic from someone like you~”

Saiki: " *Good grief. It's just useless to jump to extra conclusions when I can vouch for finding Hayasaka on the beach. And, you all know I was the one who killed L, anyway* ."

Hayasaka: ("Ah, it hurts to see Saiki still insist he's the killer…")

Latte: "Don't worry, Hayasaka. I believe in your account. You've always been so helpful to us, so you have no reason to deceive us. Oh, but I'm so happy to see you're safe too!"

Jesse: "Huh? Actually, why *is* Mr. Hayasaka alright?"

Kurumada: "Why *wouldn't* he be fine?"

Jesse: "H-Hey, man! Cool it with the beast face. I'm just sayin' that if he was knocked out by someone, then why didn't that person also try to hurt him? He walked into the scene of the crime – he could'a seen L if he walked any further!"

Natsuki: "And how'd he even end up on the beach? Did Saiki teleport him there after knocking him out himself?"

Saiki: " *It wasn't me. I only teleported away because he was coming towards the room, you know? I left before I even saw who came in* ."

Brian: "Also, I don't think Saiki would have teleported back, knocked out Hayasaka, and then teleported the both of them back to the first island. That just sounds kinda odd."

Saiki: " *I don't think my pain tolerance would've handled such a convoluted scheme. And, when would I even have the time for that before I ran into you and Jesse* ?"

Natsuki: "I-I guess you have a point. Then, does that mean someone else knocked out Hayasaka?"

Latte: "But who could that be?"

Kurumada: “It’s damn confusing. Saiki’s the only one we know who had anything to do with L’s murder. So, I swear to god, what kinda bastard felt the need to knock out Hayasaka?”

Jesse: “Maybe there’s a secret extra person connected to this case?”

Hayasaka: “Do you mean, ah, like a third party?”

Jesse: “Oh, yeah! I like that fancy term. It could’a been them who also somehow got to the storage room, knocked Mr. Hayasaka out, and took him to the beach on the first island, y’know?”

Latte: “Hum, I suppose it makes sense, but, what sort of reason would this person even have to do such a thing?”

Brian: “...I think I know. What if it was to do with the motive?”

Natsuki: “The motive?”

Brian: “Since the motive was all about killing your target, what if the person who had L as their target had planned to use the havoc over the bomb threat as a cover to kill him? But, as they arrived, they saw Hayasaka, and knocked him out to prevent him from witnessing the murder.”

Kurumada: “Uh, right. And what would this ‘killer’ do once they see that L’s already dead?”

Moony: “It must’ve been a big disappointment in their life. Epic fail?”

Brian: “B-But, um, it’s still not explained as to why L’s windpipe was crushed, right?”

Jesse: “Maybe this killer tried stranglin’ him anyway? It could be that the last injury inflicted or the most gruesome one counts as the final blow?”

Monotora: “Hahaha! The final blow is whatever actually kills the victim, dumbass! After all, that would’ve made Yuri the true killer of Retsuko in that case!”

Natsuki: “More importantly, like this has been mentioned before, we’re all in a trial right now, so clearly whoever had L as their target isn’t the killer.”

Brian: “No, I… still think it’s possible. We just need to explain more things.”

Saiki: “ *You’re just starting to sound like L now* .”

Hayasaka: (“Still, I’m interested in where he wishes to go with this…”) “What did you have in mind, Brian?”

Brian: “I was thinking that we could start… Uh, yeah! With this.”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “So, if the third party didn’t use the stairs – nor had the power to sneak up the stairs – then how did they get to the storage room?”

Jesse: “How about my idea from before, that they came from upstairs the whole time?”

Latte: “If that was the case, aren’t the only people who can come from the top five floors Nesos?”

Moony: “Why’d you all keep saying *third* party? Did I miss the other two already?”

Natsuki: “That’s not what it means, you know…”

Brian: “Hm, but that just feels like too simple of an answer…”

Kurumada: “So ya just gonna deny it ‘cuz it’s the most obvious choice?”

Brian: “W-Well, **it’s not like the stairs were the *only* way to get into the storage room**…”

Jesse: “Oh! What if they teleported inside just like Saiki can?”

Saiki: “ *I’m the only psychic here. Adding another one into the mix now would be a terrible twist.* ”

Hayasaka: (“It’s rather endearing how hard he’s thinking about things on his end…”)

VENTILATION SYSTEM

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “Brian’s right – the stairs were only one method of getting to the storage room. But, as we know, it was also possible to get inside the storage room by the vents.”

Kurumada: “Oh yeah. Hell, there was even one right in the storage room itself, eh?”

Natsuki: “How do we know the vents were even used, though?”

Saiki: “ *We found blood in the second floor’s vent, so it’s likely someone had been inside it as of recently* .”

Jesse: “Wait, are you sure it wasn’t like, Brian’s or something? He went in the vents recently too for that experiment thing.”

Brian: “Well, yes, I-I did, but I was only ever between the fifth and ninth floors during that time. But still, it would work as a good way to travel to the storage room without being heard by me, considering how loud the ventilation was at night.”

Latte: “I see. But, I’m still concerned by the blood. Where did it come from? Did the third party get injured somehow?”

Natsuki: “They were probably chased by Monotora again for going in the vents, right? Monotora must’ve attacked them for real this time.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, n-no, I don’t believe that *could* be the case. Monotora wouldn’t have been at Nesos HQ at the time.”

Jesse: “Why not?”

Kurumada: “‘Cuz we heard from Moony that they like to hang around the factory on the fourth island durin’ nighttime.”

Monotora: “...!”

Moony: “Oh! Won’t you look at that: *I’ve* given you all an important asset to figuring out the case, just like how I was the tide-turner in the first trial when I had to give you all that account about the scarf dude smack talkin’ me. I really am shapin’ up to be the main character after all!”

Saiki: “ *I really don’t think this information is as important…* ”

Natsuki: “Wait, are you kidding me?! We’ve been practically safe this whole time going outside at night? Jeeze, and I always got so worried for nothing… Well, apart from the fourth island, I guess.”

Monotora: “Will you move on from that already?! You’ve got other things to be talkin’ about, don’t ya?!”

Latte: “H-Huh?”

Hayasaka: (“Why is Monotora so pressed about that fact? Did they not want us to know about that, or…?”) “Um, a-ah, so we know being attacked by Monotora wasn’t possible. Therefore, the third party must’ve been injured another way.”

Jesse: “But how, yo?”

Brian: “Hm, I don’t think it matters right now – all we were asking is how they got to the storage room. We could just move on for now.”

Kurumada: “You sure do love movin’ on from shit.”

Brian: “Haah, w-well, I sorta got the idea from L: it’s what he used to tell us when we couldn’t currently figure something out.”

Latte: “So what happened after the third party arrived at the storage room?”

Jesse: “Don’t we know that part already? They must’a seen Mr. Hayasaka walk in and went to knock ‘im out.”

Natsuki: “But that doesn’t tell us what they did with L. Did they really just take the chance he was still alive and try strangling him anyway?”

Brian: “Um… W-Well…”

Saiki: “ *Huff. It’s a bit annoying that this is all you can amount to after I let you try to finish the case we already have the killer for* .”

Brian: “No, there must be something. Let’s talk it through again. Any strange things you can account for.”

Hayasaka: (“Brian’s determined to figure this out. He really is trying his hardest, isn’t he?”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “Let’s start right from the beginning. First, Saiki went to confront L and knocked him back into the shelf.”

Kurumada: “Right, and he teleported away when he heard Hayasaka comin’ up the stairs.”

Latte: “And, at the same time, this third party had used the vents to crawl to the storage room. **They then saw Hayasaka from the vents** and decided to knock him out.”

Jesse: “But what we don’t know is what happened after he was one-tapped.”

Kurumada: “I don’t really appreciate you talkin’ about what happened to Hayasaka like that.”

Jesse: “What, man? It’s not like I’m wrong!”

Natsuki: “He’s talking about the gamer-lingo, dummy.”

Saiki: “ *We need to stop bringing video games into these discussions already* .”

Hayasaka: (“Wait a moment. No, that couldn’t have been likely…”)

DENT ON LIGHTSWITCH

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “I don’t think the third party would have been able to see me at all. When we arrived at the storage room this morning, the lights had to be turned on. So, if the room was previously in darkness, how could it be that the third party saw anything at the time?”

Saiki: “ *Actually, the lights were on when I went to confront L.* ”

Hayasaka: “Oh? Um… Ah, I-I just realised that *was* the case, since I also remember that the lights were already on when I walked into the storage room myself last night, h-haha…”

Brian: “No, you still made a good point, Hayasaka. From that, I think we just figured out that sometime between you getting knocked out and everyone coming into the storage room this morning, the lights had been turned off.”

Kurumada: “But still, why the hell would anyone wanna do that?”

Jesse: “It could’a been the third party doin’ it to conceal their identity.”

Natsuki: “Then why didn’t they do that before they knocked out Hayasaka? They weren’t really concealing anything in case he did see them.”

Brian: “Ah, so then… maybe it was someone else they didn’t want to be seen by?”

Latte: “Oh, I know! What if it was Nesos? After all, if they’re watching from the cameras, turning off the lights would prevent them from seeing the third party too.”

Saiki: “ *You do realise Nesos would’ve already seen them entering and travelling through the vents beforehand, right* ?”

Kurumada: “So who else did they care about bein’ seen by? The only people in the room were Hayasaka – already unconscious – and L!”

Hayasaka: (“Hang on… Could it be? What if that was the answer hiding in plain sight this whole time? It’s rather absurd, but it’s definitely not the first absurd thing we’ve ever conceived here.”) “...What if it *was* L?”

Natsuki: “ *L* ? What do you mean by that?”

Hayasaka: “I mean, if it wasn’t me, the only possible person left in the room the third party would need to turn the lights off for is L.”

Jesse: “Uh, but I thought L was already dead? Y’know, lyin’ all limp against that shelf he got thrown into.”

Saiki: “ *I already said I confirmed that myself* .”

Hayasaka: “...Did you, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *Like I said, no one could have withstood what I did. Not L, probably not even Kurumada* .”

Kurumada: “Oi! And, Hayasaka’s got a point: it’s not like ya went n’ checked his pulse or whatever before teleportin’ off.”

Saiki: “ *Good grief, that doesn’t change anything. I’m not an idiot. I know what I saw* .”

Brian: “...But, I wonder… is there any evidence to prove L didn’t die from his abdomen wound?”

Hayasaka: ("Although we know L did truly die in the end, I can see why Brian wants to explore this possibility. It would've been nice to know he lived on a little longer, huh…? Ah, and, I think I know something, actually. It was that one thing I was never really sure of in the investigation…")

L'S ABDOMEN WOUND

Hayasaka: "His abdomen wound itself, I believe. When we checked the wound, I didn't think it was fatal at all."

Latte: "I do recall you had spent a bit of time looking just to make sure."

Saiki: " *That's not really concrete. After all, you said you 'think' it wasn't fatal, not that it wasn't for certain* ."

Hayasaka: "Ah, w-well… No, while you're right I can't confirm it one-hundred percent, I'm more sure of it now after thinking about it."

Saiki: " *I'm not going to easily believe in a claim like that. Any mistakes can and will lead to everyone's death* ."

Hayasaka: "And *yours* , Saiki…!"

Saiki: "..."

Hayasaka: "Saiki, I don't understand. Why're you so insistent you're the killer? Don't you want to see if there's a possibility you're not?"

Saiki: " *I'm the killer. There's no other possible way.* "

Hayasaka: "But… What I feel…"

Saiki: " *What you feel is not what you know. If there's nothing to prove it, then it's false. I don't want you to get blindsided by your denial.* "

Latte: "Saiki…! Please stop acting like this! It hurts to watch you say these things!"

Saiki: " *It's my fault this is happening. I have to take responsibility for this* ."

Hayasaka: ("No, it can't be your fault, Saiki. I can't accept it no matter how I look at it. I'm sure of it: if L was still alive, it would explain so much. It would explain why the lights had been turned off after I was knocked out. But… Saiki's right, too. I don't have any evidence to prove it. Nothing true, and nothing real. So, what can I possibly do…? *Unless…* ")

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: "I wonder… Can we make our own choices this time?"

Brian: "Huh? If we vote for someone other than the killer, we'll all die, won't we?"

Kurumada: "I didn't mean it like that! I just… Y'know, winning n' losing – it means nothing to Nesos anymore. From Mai's trial alone, I can see now how dirty they play to get what they want."

Hayasaka: "But is there anything we can do on our end?"

Kurumada: "...I don't know. S'just a thought, really. But, if it's possible to protect everyone here, then we gotta try."

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: "None of that shit even matters, anyway! Hayasaka *didn't* go to the storage room! Once he was done with Brian, he left Nesos HQ. End of fuckin' story."

Hayasaka: (“What…? Hang on, Kurumada, I told you what really happened. I told you I went upstairs to the storage ro– *ah* …”)

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“...I see. Then, maybe I can do it, too. But, if I do this, I can only do it once, and it’ll have to count.”) “...Haha. I suppose you’re right, Saiki. Of course, if we *did* prove you weren’t L’s killer, then who could it possibly go to next? Surely we wouldn’t go back to suspecting Natsuki and Jesse…”

Natsuki: “Wait what?! Who said anything about that?!”

Jesse: “Yeah, like, I thought Saiki was just pinin’ the blame on us just to hide his crime! We didn’t do shit!”

Brian: “Huh? Hayasaka, why’re you suddenly dropping your allegations? I agree that L didn’t die from what Saiki did, either.”

Saiki: “ *If you still seriously doubt the strength of my powers, then you’re just an idiot* .”

Brian: “H-Hey!”

Natsuki: “But if we really do prove it, then you guys won’t go back to suspecting us, right?”

Moony: “I feel like there’s too many pinkies still kicking, you know?”

Jesse: “Shut the hell up!”

Kurumada: “Have ya ever actually killed someone with your powers before, kid?”

Saiki: “ *Not like this, but it doesn’t matter. It’s possible for it to happen if I’m not careful.* ”

Kurumada: “Then how do you know it’s even possible?!”

Saiki: “ *Because. It. Is.* ”

Latte: “Stop fighting already!”

Natsuki: “Don’t suspect innocent people, dummy!”

Saiki: “ *Drop these stupid questions and accept the truth* .”

Latte: “Why can’t we just work together…?!”

Hayasaka: (“...I’m so sorry, everyone. I didn’t want to rile you all up like this – god knows we don’t need it. However, with the noise, it’s the only way I’ll feel comfortable doing what I have do in order to save Saiki.”)

MASS PANIC DEBATE

Natsuki: “It’s just stupid to even think about going back to me and Jesse!”

Saiki: “ *There was no way for L to survive a blow like that* .”

Latte: “Please! There must be a way to figure this out!”

Natsuki: “It’s already proven we weren’t able to travel to the fifth island!”

Kurumada: “But what if he did? Hayasaka’s a damn good medical expert, and if he says it wasn’t fatal then it’s gotta be right!”

Brian: “Hey! D-Don’t worry! There might’ve been a clue before the lights were turned off.”

Jesse: “Yeah – Saiki runnin’ into us meant we couldn’t leave the damn island even if we wanted to!”

Saiki: “ *Putting blind faith in him won’t do you any good, you know* ?”

Latte: “Ah! Maybe Hayasaka saw L alive before he was knocked out?”

Jesse: “Also, while I did say I wanted to strangle L for the bomb’s location, I only said that ‘cuz I was mad alright?!”

Kurumada: “It ain’t ‘blind faith’! I know how hard he’s been workin’ for us, and I ain’t gonna take what he says lightly!”

Brian: “Erm, actually, Hayasaka didn’t see anyone at the time. **He didn’t even see who knocked him out…**”

Natsuki: “You didn’t have to bring *that* back up! That actually makes you look suspicious, Jesse!”

Saiki: “ *That doesn’t mean I’m also going to believe everything someone says like an obedient dog, you know* ?”

Latte: “Oh, that’s right… Then, are we really hopeless?”

Hayasaka: (“...”)

HAYASAKA’S ACCOUNT

Hayasaka: (“This will… be the truth!”)

PERJURY

Hayasaka: “Ah! M-My head…!”

Latte: “Hayasaka…!”

Kurumada: “What happened…?!”

Hayasaka: “I… I just remembered something. F-From last night, when I was at the storage room.”

Natsuki: “You did?!”

Hayasaka: “Yes, I… It was when I was looking around. I saw someone behind me in the reflection of a metallic object in one of the boxes. It was hard to make out who, since it warped their appearance, but… I could make out messy, black hair, and a white shirt. However, before I had time to turn around, I had passed out.”

Jesse: “Hey, wait a minute! That sounds just like L!”

Brian: “But from the sound of it, doesn’t that mean… L was the one to knock you out?”

Natsuki “And if L was the one to knock Hayasaka out after Saiki had left, that means he *was* still alive!”

Latte: “Oh my…!”

Hayasaka: “I-I know it’s not one-hundred percent convincing evidence, but… I swear to you all, that is what I saw.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Please… Please…”)

Kurumada: “...I believe it.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…!”

Kurumada: “I mean, it’s Hayasaka for god’s sake! Why the hell would he have any reason to lie now?! He already told you all the truth earlier about goin’ to the storage room!”

Jesse: “I guess you’re right, yo. I bet his memory got all fuzzy from being knocked out in the first place.”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Hayasaka. We have your back!”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Brian…? Please, surely you understand that I needed to…”)

Brian: “...Haha. Of course I’d never doubt you, Hayasaka. Because, this proves L was still alive, doesn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, y-yes… Thank you, everyone.”

Natsuki: “Wait, so if he really was still alive, doesn’t that mean that he survived Saiki’s attack? Jeeze, maybe he was stronger than I thought.”

Latte: “That means Saiki can’t possibly be the killer, right?”

Saiki: “*... If what I did to him didn’t just kill him later* .”

Hayasaka: (“Somehow, Saiki’s words feel less strong, like he’s doubting himself. While he still may be up in the air in terms of the culprit, it’s certain he’s starting to appear less likely. It’s so strange: I did something wrong, yet I can’t help but feel so right about what it’s done…”)

Jesse: “Hey, uh, I just got one question about this whole thing though. So, we first thought Mr. Hayasaka was knocked out by the third party, but it turns out it was L this whole time. But, why him?”

Latte: “It is odd. I thought L was quite friendly with Hayasaka like we discussed earlier in the trial.”

Brian: “I don’t think it could’ve been done with ill-intent. L couldn’t have been trying to kill his target while already threatening everyone’s lives with the bombs. And he wouldn’t have thought Hayasaka was the traitor either, as even he would have already debunked the possibility like we did earlier.”

Natsuki: “But then are you saying he knocked him out with good intentions? How does that even work?”

Latte: “What if, with L being attacked by Saiki previously, and this third party on the loose, he thought Hayasaka could’ve gotten himself in danger by unknowingly walking into the storage room in such a vulnerable state?”

Kurumada: “But he didn’t have to go and hurt Hayasaka himself, damnit! He could’ve just told him to get outta there!”

Saiki: “ *L would have been walking around with a giant bloody bruise on his abdomen. How are you supposed to talk to someone without them freaking out about that* ?”

Hayasaka: “If I did see L in such a state at the time, I most likely would have tried to take him down to the infirmary to treat his wound.”

Brian: “Ah! T-That’s it! That *had* to be the reason why.”

Jesse: “Huh? What do you mean?”

Brian: “L was a stubborn person, wasn’t he? And he was especially stubborn with his desire to expose the traitor. He probably didn’t want his plan to get interrupted, even if it meant he had to maintain such an injury on his own. Not to mention how he’d have to explain to Hayasaka how he got his injury in the first place – since he didn’t know Hayasaka already knew about Saiki’s powers.

So, from his perspective, wouldn't it be better to quiet someone up so you don't have to explain yourself at all…?"

Natsuki: "God, that's… kinda messed up, but, I can see the reasoning."

Hayasaka: "I see… So, it may be possible that around the same time I entered the storage room, L himself had gotten up and found me. But…"

Saiki: " *But he decided to knock you out to spare him the frustration of explaining what happened to him until he could get his bearings back* ."

Kurumada: "Shit… Even though I'm still pissed at what he did, I'm just glad it all amounted to some selfish need n' nothing worse."

Hayasaka: ("It does fit with L's character, doesn't it? Now, I just wonder *how* he knocked me out, haha… Then again, do I really want to know from someone like him?")

Latte: "Hm, so we now know why it was L who knocked Hayasaka out. But then, back to our other question: why would the third party want to turn off the lights? Was it because of L?"

Hayasaka: "I believe so. It explains a lot in that case, doesn't it?"

Brian: "Ah, like the third party's motivation! That means they were definitely after L. By turning off the lights to hinder his sight, they would've been able to get the jump on him. So it's probably better to call this person an *assailant* instead."

Moony: "Phew. Party's over, people."

Natsuki: "Hey, are you sure? Don't you see there's a pretty big problem with that?"

Brian: "There is…?"

Natsuki: “ *Huff* , do I really have to say it myself…?”

Saiki: “ *If you’re so stubborn with saying it, then what’s the point in bringing it up* ?”

Natsuki: “Fine!”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Natsuki: “Look, you said the assailant turned off the lights because of L, right? But, the only way to do that was by the lightswitch at the entrance, right?”

Jesse: “True. I don’t remember seein’ a circuit breaker in the storage room or nothin’.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, but as we know, the assailant only got to the storage room by crawling through the vents.”

Kurumada: “And what’s so wrong with that?”

Natsuki: “Because the vent entrance is on the complete opposite side of the room from the lightswitch! Don’t you remember that layout me and Jesse drew?”

Latte: “That would mean the assailant would be quite the reach away from the lightswitch…”

Natsuki: “Exactly! So it would’ve been impossible for them to even turn off the lights without L seeing them, as **they would have to come out of the vent and walk across the room**.”

Jesse: “Oh shit, you got a real point there, Nat. Man, you’re getting really good at these trials.”

Natsuki: “W-Well, it’s just–it’s not like I *want* to be good at them or anything…!”

Hayasaka: (“It’s a good argument, however, it’s not as if that was their only option to turn off the lights…”)

DENT ON LIGHTSWITCH

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “I do agree it would be a problem for the assailant with the distance between them and the lightswitch. Although, Natsuki, I believe they did have a method of turning off the lights while still at the vent entrance.”

Natsuki: “Wait, what? How?”

Hayasaka: “We found that the lightswitch itself had been imprinted with a small dent, which meant an object might have been used to hit the switch itself rather than by hand.”

Saiki: “ *And with how sensitive the lightswitch was to the slightest touch, even if this object wasn’t pressed very hard against the switch, it still had a high chance to turn the lights off anyhow* .”

Kurumada: “Guess the assailant got pretty screwed over with how it left a dent behind though, eh? We might’a not figured it out if not for that.”

Brian: “So this means something was projected from the vents that hit the lightswitch on the other side of the room, huh?”

Latte: “But how will we figure out what that was? It’d have to have good precision too, if we were to believe the assailant did it on the first try.”

Jesse: “Yeah, otherwise L could’ve seen the object and the assailant’s plan would’a gone to shit.”

Hayasaka: (“There’s a lot of options, but in terms of what we have access to, we’re also somewhat limited. We just need to keep talking to find it.”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Kurumada: “An object that could’a been projected from the vents, eh? Could it be that the assailant tossed somethin’?”

Jesse: “How about a ball? There’s a bunch’a tennis balls in the sports centre.”

Saiki: “ *A tennis ball wouldn’t have left behind a tiny dent, you know* ?”

Jesse: “Okay, fine, you want somethin’ smaller? How about a crumpled up piece of tin foil? And then one of the pointy corners scratched the lightswitch when it hit it.”

Natsuki: “That just seems really convoluted, Jesse.”

Jesse: “Then I don’t know! How about a pin?”

Latte: “I don’t think it would’ve been possible to throw a pin so far very accurately, dear.”

Jesse: “Damnit, then I don’t fucking know! I just would’a **shot the damn thing with a gun** if it were me!”

Brian: “T-That’s a bit of a violent reaction…”

Hayasaka: ("...Maybe it really was possible. As much as I didn't think it would ever be relevant to the case…")

BOX OF FIREARMS

Hayasaka: ("This is it!")

CONSENT

Hayasaka: "Surprisingly, I think a type of gun might've actually been used. It fits the description of the object we need with its ability to project ammunition, right? And, there is a box of firearms in the storage room we all have access to."

Jesse: "Yo! I knew the guns had some kinda connection!"

Saiki: " *It feels less like you knew it, and more that you hoped it would be true* …"

Jesse: "What's so wrong with that? I haven't seen a case with guns yet before."

Moony: "It probably already happened in another universe. Nothing is original anymore."

Kurumada: "If somethin' like that was really used, the assailant must'a collected it in advance some point after we got access to the storage room."

Natsuki: "Jeeze, I don't like the idea that someone was carrying around a gun this whole time."

Monotora: " *That* 's what you're really afraid of? There's much more dangerous things to worry about here than that – like me! Kehehe."

Brian: "But, hum, how small can bullets go?"

Jesse: “Depends on what kinda gun you want.”

Brian: “I-I don’t want a gun! I’m just trying to figure out *what* gun was used…”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I see what you mean, Brian. With how small the dent was, I don’t think it was possible that a bullet was used to cause it.”

Latte: “So it wasn’t a gun after all?”

Jesse: “Wait, there was a dart gun in that box, too! And dart tips are small as hell, perfect for makin’ a dent like that.”

Natsuki: “Then a dart gun was used to turn off the lights this whole time, huh? I-I guess it really was possible…”

Saiki: “ *It’s not like you have to be right all the time* .”

Natsuki: “Hey! Hang on. I just realised something – I get turning off the lights to hinder L’s sight, but wouldn’t that also just hinder the assailant’s sight too?”

Kurumada: “Oh, come on! I thought we were finally past this damn part!”

Natsuki: “I-It’s not my fault, stupid! Anyone would’ve figured that out!”

Latte: “No matter what, it’s still a problem. Now, both L and the assailant wouldn't be able to see anything in the dark!”

Jesse: “Maybe the assailant was gonna wing it and charge at L?”

Hayasaka: “That seems a bit, ah, reckless to try on someone as diligent as L. I would think they would have something more thought-through in mind, considering their dart gun plan previously.”

Kurumada: “So what the hell did they do instead?”

Brian: “Mm, I think we need to stop looking at it from the assailant’s perspective, and more on L’s?”

Natsuki: “Why is L’s perspective important here?”

Brian: “Well, you know, uh… What would L do next after the lights went out? If we answer that, maybe we could figure out how it ties into what the assailant did.”

Hayasaka: (“That’s a rather interesting way to look at it. It’s clear Brian is using a lot of L’s previous techniques, isn’t it?”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Jesse: “If I was L when the lights went out, I would’ve booked it outta there! It clearly was a sign someone else had shown up to do some dirty work.”

Brian: “Well, erm, yes, but L was still waiting for the traitor, right?”

Saiki: “ *Are you saying he was seriously going to stay around even if he thought it was dangerous* ? *He really was insane* .”

Kurumada: “No shit! Hayasaka was still there! Ya think he was gonna leave him there too?!”

Natsuki: “If he was going to stay, he probably went to go look for a light source. He was too smart to just hope that the rest of his senses could guide him.”

Latte: “Did he try to go and turn on the lights?”

Jesse: “Nah, he probably thought whoever turned them off would be hanging close around the lightswitch.”

Latte: “Oh, then how about **going to look for a flashlight**?”

Natsuki: “Do you think he could’ve navigated to them in time?”

Latte: “As long as he was light on his feet I suppose!”

Saiki: “ *...I really hope that wasn’t a pun* .”

Hayasaka: (“That does make the most sense with what we found…”)

BROKEN FLASHLIGHT

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

CONSENT

Hayasaka: “I also think that’s what L did, Latte. We found a flashlight out of its box, so someone must have taken it out to use it.”

Natsuki: “But how did he know where they were in the dark? We only really knew because of our investigation.”

Brian: “I have a feeling L knew the general area of where the flashlights were in the storage room. After all, it does sound like him to memorise the locations of helpful items just in case something happened.”

Kurumada: “I’m not even gonna argue with that. Mr. Detective even found all that other shit beforehand, like the walkie-talkie. He ‘prolly knew where everything was in that damn room.”

Jesse: “Yeah, but you’re forgettin’ that the flashlight was broken on the floor right by its own box. Like, did L accidentally drop it in the dark?”

Hayasaka: (“Wait a moment… If the flashlight was by the box… and L was the one to retrieve that flashlight… *No…* Could that even be possible?”)

Brian: “Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: (“It’s just so absurd, and yet…”)

Kurumada: “Heheh. Looks like he’s deep in thought ‘bout something.”

Saiki: “ *Why did you say that so weird* ?”

Kurumada: “Like hell I did! Don’t make shit up!”

Natsuki: “He’s so bad at hiding it…”

Kurumada: “Hidin’ what?!”

Hayasaka: (“I’m not sure if I can really articulate it on my own. But, I don’t want to drop it until I know if it could’ve been possible. Then, what if I tried what I did last time, by asking questions to everyone else? There should be no harm in it, although, I’m not sure why everyone’s suddenly gone quiet…”)

BEACHSIDE BRAINSTORM

>>[VIDEO: BEACHSIDE BRAINSTORM]<<

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Then… As L was right below where the assailant was, could it have been possible for them to have jumped onto L?”

Natsuki: “ *Jumped* onto him? Who the hell would even think to do that?!”

Jesse: “That sounds crazy, man! Like, I didn’t think *that* was gonna be their foolproof plan.”

Brian: “But, with such a position right above L, doesn’t it feel too perfect?”

Moony: “What’s next? Did they stomp on his head or something?”

Monotora: “Now, where have I seen that one before? Gehehe.”

Latte: “I doubt they jumped onto his head, or he would’ve had an injury there too.”

Hayasaka: “I-I suppose I should’ve clarified they jumped on him to pin him down, h-haha…”

Kurumada: “Hey, doesn’t that also tell us why the flashlight was broken? If the assailant jumped onto L just after he picked it up, it must’a smashed when he got pinned to the floor.”

Hayasaka: “Exactly. And, there’s further evidence to prove this was the case, too…”

GLASS SHARDS IN L’S HAND

Hayasaka: “The thin shards of glass we found in L’s hand match the glass of the flashlight, don’t they?”

Saiki: “ *They must’ve gotten lodged in his hand when the flashlight smashed on the ground* .”

Hayasaka: “And I believe this all must have been the assailant’s trick.”

Jesse: “What do you mean by trick?”

Brian: “Oh, I get it. By turning out the lights, they could make L assume the entrance was off-limits.”

Latte: “And since he didn’t know the assailant was in the vents the whole time, he must have assumed they were by the entrance.”

Hayasaka: “Therefore, as L went to find a lightsource, being the flashlight, it would essentially lure him towards the shelf where the assailant was waiting in the vent above to jump down on him.”

Natsuki: “Still, would someone like L really just… fall for that? He knew about the vents too, you know?”

Saiki: “ *He might’ve gotten the idea someone could’ve also turned off the lights from the vents just like we did. In that case, he’d never go over to that shelf* .”

Kurumada: “Well he must have! Or else why was he still in the damn storage room?”

Hayasaka: “I think it was different in the moment. Yes, L did have two possible ways of escape – the entrance and the vents – but he had no way of truly knowing where the assailant was, or even how many there were. It would’ve been a gamble trying either route.”

Brian: “Also, L was tackling with his abdomen injury at the time. He didn’t really have the choice of sitting tight and hoping for the best, unfortunately…”

Moony: “It’s kinda like bein’ trapped in noughts n’ crosses. Or connect four. I personally enjoyed playing connect one with Ena: I always make sure to have my turn first.”

Jesse: “Wait, what if… This is gonna sound kinda fucked up, but, ‘cuz Mr. Hayasaka was closer to the entrance, what if L left him there as bait so he could go get a flashlight, just in case the assailant really was at the entrance instead?”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Kurumada: “What the hell?! He better not have, the bastard!”

Brian: “W-Wait! I don’t think L would’ve wanted to put Hayasaka in danger! He probably just chose the flashlight route so he could protect both himself and Hayasaka, right? It would be bad if he tried to navigate around without being able to see anything.”

Hayasaka: “R-Right…” (“I can only hope that was L’s true intentions…”)

Latte: “So does that mean we’ve solved what the assailant did? They turned out the lights to force L into a situation where he’d have to come underneath the vent so they could pin him down. But, what did they do next?”

Brian: “I think… we already *know* that part, right? It’s the only injury left on L not accounted for.”

Natsuki: “Oh, you mean his neck wound?”

Jesse: “And ‘cuz we know rope was used to strangle him, the assailant must’a done that to him when they pinned him down.

Saiki: “ *They had to have collected the rope in advance just like they did with the dart gun.* ”

Jesse: “Shit… is that it? Did we figure everything out?”

Hayasaka: “Ah, I don’t think so. After all, they didn’t just leave L by that shelf. No, I believe the assailant had more than just that planned.”

Kurumada: “D’ya mean how we found him in the first place, tied up in that chair?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, the assailant must’ve tied L up to make it appear as if the whole case was actually an interrogation.”

Brian: “I bet they even used his abdomen wound to their advantage. It made us think he had been injured as a means of torturing him for answers about the bombs, huh?”

Latte: “Wait a moment. If the assailant *did* strangle L, wouldn’t that make it his cause of death?”

Hayasaka: “Ah… Yes. It would, wouldn’t it? Haha…”

Natsuki: “Huh? Why does that make you sound so happy?”

Hayasaka: “S-Sorry, it’s just… If L’s cause of death was via strangulation, that means he didn’t die from his abdomen wound. In that case… L’s killer would be the assailant, the true culprit. Not… Not Saiki.”

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “Oh my goodness… I almost can’t believe it! This is wonderful! Oh, thank you so much Kurumada!”

Kurumada: “Eh? Why’re ya thanking *me* ?”

Latte: “Because you were the one that allowed us to continue talking about the case. It led us to realising Saiki’s innocence!”

Kurumada: “I mean, I dunno, I only did it outta anger. Not ‘cuz I really knew it was gonna be true or not…”

Hayasaka: (“No, I really need to thank you, Kurumada. Without you, I’m not sure if I would’ve been able to speak up for myself, or done something as crazy as you to have allowed the trial to continue on. I really thank you for sticking up for me…”)

Kurumada: “...Heheh.”

Hayasaka: (“Huh? Ah, he’s looking at me, isn’t he? Did he just see my face right now…? How embarrassing. But, I assume he knows how grateful I am for what he did…”)

Saiki: “...”

Latte: “Saiki?”

Saiki: “*... If I’m really not the killer, then...* ”

Hayasaka: (“I think he’s having a bit of trouble saying ‘thank you’, haha…”) “I-It’s alright, Saiki. You don’t have to say it out loud. We know what you mean.”

Saiki: “ *Phew …*”

Natsuki: “Hehe, and I thought I was stubborn.”

Saiki: “ *Don’t push it* .”

Natsuki: “H-Hey!”

Hayasaka: (“With that, we managed to figure out the timeline of events for the case. We even managed to prove Saiki’s innocence. However, all that’s left to do is…”)

Jesse: “Hey, so… If the killer’s not Saiki, and it’s the assailant person instead, then who is that?”

Kurumada: “The true culprit… I dunno if we got any leads this time around. Damnit.”

Brian: “A-Actually… I think I might know. Well, I don’t exactly know their identity, but I know there’s a one-hundred percent guarantee on how we can find them.”

Latte: “Oh really? How?”

Brian: “Like I said before: the killer is whoever had L as their target. So, if we just go around and reveal who each of us had as our target, even if the person who has L refuses to tell us, they’ll be caught out from the process of elimination.”

Saiki: “ *When will you drop this debunked theory already* ?”

Brian: “Huh?”

Natsuki: “Isn’t this like the third time you’ve said that? Don’t we already know it’s impossible for the killer to be whoever had L as their target because of the fact we’re in a trial?”

Brian: “Um, y-yes, I know you all said that a lot, but just hear me out this time. After some thinking, I realised something important about the motive, and what Nesos have done with it. It’s something we all overlooked, maybe even by L himself.”

Hayasaka: (“Even by L himself…? That’s a rather bold claim.”) “What are you talking about, Brian?”

Brian: “There was a motive clause that Nesos decided to leave out. It’s that the killer had to *disclose* they were the one to kill L in order to be set free without a trial!”

Jesse: “Wait, shit, for real?!”

Latte: “If that’s the case, then doesn’t that change what we know about the motive? As no one came forth when we found L, that must be why Monotora still told us to investigate his murder.”

Kurumada: “Hell, I wouldn’t put it past ‘em to do somethin’ as scummy as that. Nesos are always playin’ dirty. Nice job there – I wasn’t expecting that from someone like ya.”

Brian: “T-Thanks, erm, but what do you mean by the last part…?”

Hayasaka: (“I see. So, if Nesos really did leave out something as important as that, I wonder if it was to try and cause more distrust among the group by forcing the killer to expose themselves in front of everyone by their own words. But, because of how far we’ve come, did the killer feel hesitant to come forth? But then… just what was the point of murdering L in the first place?”)

Brian: “So, how about it, Monotora? You and Nesos deliberately left out that whoever had L as their target had to disclose their murder to you, didn’t you?”

Monotora: “...”

Brian: “...So–”

Monotora: “Mm, nope. We didn’t need ‘em to do that.”

Brian: “...”

Monotora: “...”

Brian: “S-Say what now?”

Monotora: “Look, all the person needed to do was kill L in some way. Then, we’d announce to everyone that they successfully eliminated their target, and will be leaving the island shortly. Cut and dry, eh?”

Kurumada: “ *Cut and dry* ?”

Monotora: “What? What’s with all the scrunched up faces? We were keepin’ things simple this time around. Don’t believe me? I even got a script for it I was meant’a read from. Though, I might’ve chewed on it a bit.”

Brian: “Huh? But, but… That wouldn’t be… But if you think about it… I-If there was just… U-Um…”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Brian. Your idea was worth a shot! We all get things wrong sometimes.”

Brian: “But… No, I was so sure that was it. Just like when L would accuse Nesos of similar things before. Y-You know, like when he said–”

Saiki: “ *Just give it a rest already. You’re not L, so you’re not going to get the same results as him just by making random theories* .”

Jesse: “Yeah, man. Someone else will ‘prolly come up with another idea, anyway.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Brian… He was so confident in his idea. To be shot down like this must be horrible. Not, no just horrible, because…”)

FLASHBACK

Brian: “Hey… Do you guys think I’m stupid?”

FLASHBACK

Brian: “But, me? What have I done? I’m not doing enough to even be considered close to your level, or to be helpful.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“He’s been trying so hard this trial to figure out the truth. He’s been doing so much on his own. He’s trying to be like L. He’s trying to be like…”)

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“...He’s trying to be like *me* .”)

…

Hayasaka: “...Hey, Brian. You know what you should do now, don’t you?”

Brian: “H-Huh…?”

Hayasaka: “You know, it’s like you’ve been saying this whole time. If we don’t know what to do, we should talk about the case again, so we can pick out any details we’ve missed. After all, it’s gotten us here, hasn’t it? I think you should have more assurance in yourself, Brian, haha.”

Brian: “Hayasaka… No, ah, you’re right. There has to be something.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, he appears a lot better now. I think my encouragement got through to him. I sort of feel… happy. It’s a bit strange. Should I be feeling happy now? Although… unlike before, when L would always encourage us, it always left a sinking feeling in my chest, that something horrible was going to be uncovered. Yet, speaking to Brian right now, my chest feels light, as if things are going to turn out for the better.”)

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “Alright, let’s talk about the case from start to finish. Try to remember as many details as you can.”

Kurumada: “Guess it all started when Saiki went to confront L, eh?”

Jesse: “Then, with his crazy-ass telekinesis, he flung L back into a shelf, and completely fucked up his insides.”

Saiki: “ *I’m not even going to comment on how you described that so awfully* .”

Latte: “However, as Hayasaka heard the commotion, he went upstairs to check it out. Saiki teleported away, leaving only L in the storage room.”

Natsuki: “It turned out that L survived the injury, and found Hayasaka. But, because he didn’t want to explain himself, he knocked him out.”

Kurumada: “I still kinda hate that was the first option he went with…”

Brian: “And then, around this time, the true culprit had come to the storage room by the vents. They turned out the lights to force L to come under the shelf they were waiting above.”

Jesse: “When L was right underneath ‘em, they jumped down to pin him and strangled him to death.”

Latte: “Afterwards, they set things up to make it look like L had been interrogated about the bombs instead.”

Moony: “Is that it? Man, and here I thought we were actually **missing something really important we all forgot**.”

Natsuki: “ *Huff* , you better not ask us to go over it again twice or something.”

Brian: “W-Well, uh, heheh…”

Hayasaka: (“Wait a moment. Something *is* off, isn’t it? We haven’t mentioned that thing in a while…”)

SLEDGEHAMMER

Hayasaka: (“This is it!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “No, I think we *have* been forgetting something. Ever since we figured out the shelf was what caused L’s abdomen wound, we’ve completely abandoned the sledgehammer’s relevancy towards the case.”

Jesse: “Damn, I almost forgot about that too! And there’s no way it wasn’t used with its head covered in all that blood.”

Latte: “Could it have simply been a cover-up, do you think? What if the killer covered it in L’s blood, or used blood bags from the infirmary? That way, it would make it look like it was used.”

Kurumada: “Still, I just find it so strange how we even found a sledgehammer in the storage room, y’know? It sure as hell didn’t come from there, and we’ve never found something like that anywhere else.”

Jesse: “Not even in the supermarket, yo.”

Natsuki: “It feels like something Nesos would have, not us.”

Hayasaka: “ *Ah…* !”

Brian: “ *Oh…* !”

Latte: “What is it?”

Hayasaka: “It *is* a strange weapon for any of us to have access to, so what if it *was* provided by Nesos?”

Brian: “Yeah, that was exactly what I was thinking! Since we don’t know what’s on the top five floors, there’s a chance the only place the sledgehammer came from was somewhere up there.”

Saiki: “ *And as only Nesos have access to those floors, it makes sense they were the ones to have it in the first place* .”

Monotora: “...Don’t be so sure about that.”

Brian: “H-Huh? Why not?”

Monotora: “Because your ideas are comedic at best, Brian! Kehehe! Are you that desperate to get shot down by me a second time?”

Brian: “...No, this isn’t just my idea. It’s something me and Hayasaka realised together. So, I feel much more confident about it.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Monotora: “...”

Brian: “In fact… Mm, could there be even more things we’ve overlooked that could only belong to Nesos?”

Hayasaka: “With how the culprit’s side of the case was orchestrated, it seems rather planned out, from the lightswitch trick to making L’s death appear an interrogation. So, perhaps there is a chance for such a thing.”

Jesse: “Whoa, I’ve never seen those two so pumped up before. What’d you call that shit again? Synergy?”

Kurumada: “Bwahaha, it’s damn good to see. I like to see you so confident, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Ah, h-haha…”

Saiki: “ *If you say things like that, he’s just going to clam up again* .”

Latte: “I for one am all for it! What should we discuss first?”

Brian: “Well, let’s think about the items the killer brought with them in advance: the rope and the dart gun.”

Natsuki: “I don’t think the rope was from Nesos. We all have access to that in the supermarket *and* the storage room.”

Jesse: “How about the dart gun then? Was anything wrong with that?”

Latte: “Hm… Well, it was only accessible from the storage room, so maybe someone spotted the killer taking it in advance?”

Brian: “I don’t think so. After all, the killer had a lot of opportunities to take it, and it wasn’t as if many people were ever at the storage room prior to our initial investigation.”

Jesse: “What if Nesos upgraded the dart gun somehow, like, made its aim super precise?”

Kurumada: “Now you’re just makin’ this sound like some video game…”

Hayasaka: (“Is there a way to check if the dart gun was only available via Nesos? Wait…”) “Jesse, could you recall what you found in the box of firearms again?”

Jesse: “Sure. But, I don’t think there was anything off about it. You had the m16s, g19s, rugers, the dart gun… And stuff like that.”

Saiki: “ *Why didn’t you pluralise dart gun* ?”

Jesse: “‘Cuz there was only one? My grammar ain’t that down the toilet, yo!”

Hayasaka: “Only one…? But, there were multiple models of the other firearms, correct?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, I remember seeing a bunch of each before.”

Kurumada: “Now that I’m thinking about it, don’t it feel weird how in a box full of real guns, there was just some dart gun, which ain’t as lethal?”

Jesse: “Hey, there’s ‘prolly some method to kill someone with a dart gun.”

Kurumada: “That wasn’t what I meant! I’m just saying it’s weird to group such a thing together. Feels like it was never meant to be in the box in the first place.”

Brian: “I think so, too. It sounds like the killer was provided it by Nesos solely for the lightswitch trick.”

Hayasaka: “That must be it. Unlike with the firearms and their bullets, the dart gun could supply a small yet precise dart to hit the lightswitch on the opposite side of the room from the vent.”

Natsuki: “That reminds me: how come the killer felt safe enough to use the vents in the first place? Considering the last time someone used them, they were chased by Monotora.”

Latte: “Don’t forget that Moony told some of us a few days before the murder took place that Monotora spends the night on the fourth island. In that case, could the killer have already known it was safe to use?”

Hayasaka: “No, even if they did know that Monotora wouldn’t be there, it doesn’t mean the vents were fully safe. We thought Brian was alright escaping the vents after the experiment, but he still faced a punishment later on.”

Jesse: “Wait, so how come the killer didn’t receive a punishment for using ‘em?”

Hayasaka: “I believe if the killer was somehow connected to Nesos, they would be able to use the vents whenever they liked.”

Brian: “Ah, there’s one more thing I just remembered, too. It was what Monotora said earlier in the trial…”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Then… As L was right below where the assailant was, could it have been possible for them to have jumped onto L?”

Natsuki: “ *Jumped* onto him? Who the hell would even think to do that?!”

Jesse: “That sounds crazy, man! Like, I didn’t think *that* was gonna be their foolproof plan.”

Brian: “But, with such a position right above L, doesn’t it feel too perfect?”

Moony: “What’s next? Did they stomp on his head or something?”

Monotora: “Now, where have I seen that one before? Gehehe.”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “What did they mean by that? That’s never happened in any of these murder cases before.”

Monotora: “I never meant it came from *this* set of cases, bozo Brian!”

Brian: “B-Bozo…?”

Jesse: “Wait, there’s been more cases? Since when?”

Hayasaka: “Hang on… Is Monotora referring to the murder simulation cases?”

Natsuki: “Oh yeah, those were technically also murder cases. Maybe it was possible that in one of those cases, someone else had died from being jumped on from a high place, like how the killer jumped onto L from the vents.”

Moony: “See? I told you nothing was original anymore. Maybe I should just dye my hair pink and join the club.”

Saiki: “ *Please don’t* .”

Monotora: “Kehehe, now you’re usin’ those noggins. Now tell me, which case could that have been?”

Kurumada: “Who cares? It’s not like that matters to this case, dumbass.”

Monotora: “Does it look like I was making a suggestion?! Not a single one of you bastards even bothered to try and solve any of the cases we showed you! Oh, except sweet tooth, of course. Too bad you can’t egg him on for answers no more, eh? Mwehehe.”

Kurumada: “What the hell?! Since when did you ever say we were s’posed to do somethin’ like that?”

Latte: “I’m sure it’ll be alright. The quicker we solve that, the quicker we can get back to our case.”

Brian: “Err, from what I recall, the rooms were a study, kitchen, performance hall, and principal’s office.”

Saiki: “ *The study and principal’s office can’t be it. They wouldn’t have anywhere high up to jump off from* .”

Jesse: “Yo! What if someone jumped off the railings in the performance hall?”

Hayasaka: “Hang on… Didn’t Kurumada and Latte say something about a spice shelf in the kitchen back when we had to collect those pieces for Monotora? How high up was that shelf?”

Kurumada: “It was pretty high up, but you could ‘prolly get onto it by climbing onto one of the crates nearby.”

Latte: “Oh my, then was it possible for someone to have jumped off the shelf onto their victim?”

Monotora: “Kehehehe! The wound was pretty dirty after the stomp!”

Latte: “Huh? What do you mean by ‘stomp’?”

Natsuki: “Ugh, it doesn’t matter. At least we know we were right.”

Brian: “Wait, but doesn’t that confirm that the killer jumping out of the vent in L’s case has a direct similarity to that simulation’s case? Monotora wouldn’t have been so, uh, forward about it otherwise.”

Jesse: “So what if it’s similar? It could’a just been a coincidence.”

Hayasaka: “I don’t think it is. For such an odd idea, I think it was taken as direct inspiration. That would mean the only person capable of coming up with such a thing would have to have known about how the simulated case played out.”

Kurumada: “But none of us even knew that was how that murder happened! It was our first time bein’ exposed to it when we went in the VR world, weren’t it?”

Hayasaka: “But there would be someone who did, right?”

Saiki: “*... Nesos. They were the ones to create the simulation in the first place* .”

Natsuki: “Then… Is the killer really connected to Nesos somehow?”

Moony: “Can we have a quick re-cap? My brain’s going spaghetti mode over here.”

Brian: “Well, we figured out the sledgehammer and dart gun were something no one had access to. Not only that, but the vents were off-limits for us, unless we wanted to face punishment. And, there seems to be an imitation of a simulated murder case that none of us knew about beforehand.”

Latte: “However, that all would’ve been possible for the killer if they were from Nesos, hm?”

Jesse: “Wait, is that even allowed? I thought, like, this death game was just supposed to be between us, yo. Ain’t that what the tiger said before?”

FLASHBACK

Monotora: “Each and every one of you meat puppets has been chosen to participate in a mutual death game, hosted by the company who scouted you in the first place! Ahaha!”

Hayasaka: (“Death… *death game* ?”)

Kaidou: “U-Um, what do you mean by… death game?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, you’re making no sense. It’s creeping me out…”

Monotora: “Heh. You see, everyone will live together on this island in mutual peace for the rest of your lives… Well, most of the time. If you wish to leave, then you must commit murder on another one of your fellow *co-workers* without being caught. Then, and only then, you’ll be free to leave this island!”

FLASHBACK END

Natsuki: “Yeah, they did make it sound like it was only meant to be us participating in this. Why would someone from Nesos need to commit a murder?”

Kurumada: “‘Side from it breaking their damn flimsy rules again, it makes no sense. If they wanted L dead, they could’a just punished him anytime they wanted.”

Hayasaka: “But what if… That *was* the point of this whole case? If we all believed a normal participant was the killer, Nesos could potentially sway the outcome of the trial in their favour by making us think something that wasn’t true.”

Brian: “And because of that… were they trying to trick us into voting incorrectly?”

Natsuki: “That would just lead to us all getting executed!”

Jesse: “What the hell? Were they tryn’a execute us for the bomb threat or vent experiment or some shit?”

Saiki: “ *But both of those were L’s ideas. That wasn’t our doing.* ”

Kurumada: “Exactly! That’s not even playin’ dirty, that’s just straight-up wrong, damnit!”

Hayasaka: (“If someone from Nesos was behind L’s murder, was this the reason for it? Was it all a trick to kill everyone? It is true that Nesos has been permitting our deaths, but it’s always been for the slow stakes of the death game. Why would they want to kill the rest of us off in one go? Is it something we did, or did they simply get bored of us…?”)

Latte: “Hang on a moment, I have a small question. We keep saying someone ‘from Nesos’ is the killer. But who exactly is that?”

Natsuki: “Isn’t that what we’re trying to answer? We can’t really put a face to the name yet.”

Latte: “Yes, but what I mean is that we don’t know how many people are behind Nesos, or what all of their roles are. With so many options, how are we going to dwindle it down?”

Hayasaka: (“She’s right. It won’t be enough to claim the killer is just ‘someone from Nesos’. But, I think I know who it is. And, even L himself mentioned them before…”)

FLASHBACK

L: “However, what I really want to find out is where the main organiser of the death game is hiding, or in other words, the mastermind behind this company.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“It has to be them, right? Then, what if I explained it this way?”) “I think I have a way to overcome that problem. What if we theoretically combined all of Nesos into one person, ergo, the mastermind?”

Jesse: “Yo, that sounds like a dope-ass name!”

Saiki: “ *Don’t go complimenting Nesos just because they were given a new term* .”

Monotora: “...So, this is where the discussion has arrived at? You all think the killer is actually part of Nesos’ workforce? That’s a new one for sure. And here I thought Baby Blue’s Dark Reunion spiel was the height of absurdity.”

Saiki: “ *We have evidence to back it up. It just sounds like you’re attempting to deny it* .”

Monotora: “Like hell I am! It’ll be off with your heads once you vote wrong, you know? After all, how will you vote for someone who isn’t even a candidate?”

Jesse: “Maybe if we, like, don’t vote, we win because we didn’t technically pick wrong?”

Monotora: “If you don’t vote, that’s just a freebie for me to rip n’ tear into ya, idiot!”

Hayasaka: “...Would you kill all of us just like that?”

Monotora: “Hm?”

Hayasaka: “Like we said before, if someone behind Nesos was responsible for L’s murder, that would mean they were trying to force us into a corner where no matter who we voted for, we would be wrong. So, what if that was the only option we have?”

Monotora: “And what if it just leads you all to death too?”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t believe you want to end it here.”

Natsuki: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: “Even if the chance is low, the possibility still persists. And if it’s the only chance I believe in, then so be it.”

Latte: “Hayasaka…”

Kurumada: “...Heheh. Can ya argue with him when he’s making such a determined face?”

Monotora: “...To think you could go so far into your own delusions to the point where you’re wagering life and death… It’s almost worth a damn. Hey, by my guest. If you want to continue down this path, you better be prepared to reap what you sow.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah… Somehow, I managed to neutralise even Monotora. Something like that… Is this why I felt so hopeful before? After all, it is the one thing I believe in. With the idea that the mastermind is behind L’s death, it means *everyone* here is innocent. Not Saiki. Not anyone else. I don’t have to do it anymore. I don’t have to convict anyone else I know of murder. I don’t have to send anyone else to their death. No one, but the terrible person who put us in this death game.”)

…

Hayasaka: “Then, it’s settled, isn’t it? The one behind this case, the one who killed L, was the mastermind–”

Brian: “That’s not it!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “B…Brian?”

Brian: “Mastermind? You mean the traitor, right?”

Hayasaka: “The… *traitor* ? I don’t… what are you talking about?”

Brian: “Don’t get me wrong. I agree that the person who killed L is definitely someone working with Nesos! But, there’s a much more reasonable explanation than the mastermind. It’s just like L himself proposed before, remember? If Nesos had a traitor, they could order them to murder anyone whenever they needed. Why would the mastermind go out of their way to do all this dirty work, when they could just send someone else to do it for them?”

Hayasaka: (“L’s initial theory on the traitor…”)

FLASHBACK

L: “We can’t be dead set on a single suspect, however. That would only cloud our judgement.”

Hayasaka: “...Then, are you saying you want us to suspect everyone else?”

L remained silent at the question, before shaking his head.

L: “As a detective, it’s best to keep an open mind.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...You have a point. And yet, at the end of the day, we *don’t* actually know if a traitor exists. What we do know is that there are people behind Nesos”

Brian: “But, doesn’t this whole case prove the traitor’s existence?”

Hayasaka: (“If there’s a traitor…”) “...No, there isn’t one.”

Brian: “Huh? Hayasaka? Um, well, that’s okay. I’ll just have to convince you that there is.”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Brian: “The traitor must be real. Nesos could have provided them all the items they needed beforehand, and would have the safety of using the vents.”

Hayasaka: “If there was a traitor, then how come no one was already familiar with the murder simulations? That was the only way they would have come up with the idea of jumping down on L from the vent.”

Brian: “They never really needed to know. It sounds like Nesos instructed them on how to carry out the murder anyway. Ah, Hayasaka, you don’t have to worry about this theory. I know you’re not the traitor, but **one of the others who were searching for the bombs** last night.”

Hayasaka: (“No… That can’t be right.”)

BOMB SEARCH

Hayasaka: (“I’ll cut through the contradiction!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “The others who were searching for the bombs? No, I don’t think that’s possible. Monotora told us the bombs were dealt with before we started our investigation, meaning Nesos must’ve known where L hid the bombs. In that case, wouldn’t that mean the traitor should’ve known too?”

Natsuki: “But, everyone claimed they couldn’t find a single bomb, and we were searching all night!”

Brian: “What if the traitor pretended not to find any bombs? What if they were just never told where any were by Nesos? There’s a lot of ways for them to get around that, if you think about it.”

Hayasaka: “But… Brian, why? Why are you so insistent that there’s a traitor…?”

Brian: “Insistent? I thought you knew it was L’s theory. Even you know his ideas weren’t to be taken lightly. You don’t think it has some merit?”

Kurumada: “Yeah, but Mr. Detective had a ton of theories he wouldn’t share with us. If he was always right, why’d he have to go and be so stubborn about ‘em?”

Brian: “No, the ones he didn’t tell us were right, too. He was always just holding out for more evidence to prove it.”

Jesse: “It sure as hell didn’t make him very likeable, though.”

Hayasaka: (“...I just don’t…”)

Brian: “...Ah, hang on. It’s not just that. We never figured out how Hayasaka was transported to the beach.”

Hayasaka: “That…”

Natsuki: “Well, he clearly wasn’t taken down the stairs, or else Brian would’ve heard so at the time.”

Latte: “But the only other method of getting out of Nesos HQ would have been the vents.”

Kurumada: “You’re not sayin’ Hayasaka was carried *through* the vents, are ya?”

Jesse: “I guess it could’a worked. If the killer crawled backwards in the vents, they could drag Mr. Hayasaka along with them.”

Saiki: “ *What about the blood we found in the 2nd floor vent? Where would that have even come from in that case* ?”

Brian: “It must’ve come from the killer: not as an injury, per say, but blood from L. Then, the killer carried Hayasaka all the way to the beach on the first island, and went back to their bomb search to blend in. So, what do you think, Hayasaka? That must have been what happened, right?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Latte: “Well, it does sound plausible…”

Jesse: “I kinda see it, honestly. Makes sense to get him away from the crime scene anyway, in case he woke up.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, that could’ve even been an order by Nesos, too.”

Saiki: “ *...I guess the only way we’d even have a chance of voting for someone is if they were the traitor.* ”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…? No, even Saiki agrees with this? How? He was so mad at L for obsessing over it before…”)

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Even if everyone agrees… Even if Brian’s theory makes sense… The idea that the killer is the traitor…? No… No… I don’t want to accept that. Why would I want to accept that…?”)

Kurumada: “...Hey, Hayasaka. Who do you think did it? The mastermind, or the traitor?”

Hayasaka: (“Kurumada…”) “The… The mastermind.”

Kurumada: “Alright. I believe it’s the mastermind too.”

Brian: “Huh? But, if you think about it–”

Kurumada: “I don’t wanna *think* about sending another one of us to death! I’m gonna put my belief in Hayasaka. What he thinks is what I think, and you all ain’t gonna change that.”

Saiki: “ *Good grief. You’re terribly stubborn* .”

Latte: “Aw, but isn’t it sweet how much he wants to support Hayasaka?”

Natsuki: “That’s no good, you know? If those two still believe it’s the mastermind, then we’re just left with a split between the identity of the killer–”

Monotora: “Gahahaha! There it is! There it is again! You idiots just make my job so easy, don’t ya?”

Natsuki: “I-I didn’t say anything weird, dummy!”

Monotora: “But yer *did* say split. If ya deny it, I might gut yer open from neck to waist!”

Jesse: “Hey! Leave her alone, asshole!”

Monotora: “Okay, fine. I’ll gut *you* instead.”

Kurumada: “Just shut it with ya threats already! If you want to do a scrum debate so badly, then let’s fuckin’ do one!”

Brian: “H-Huh? Wait, you *want* to argue over this? But… Hayasaka, is that what you really want?”

Hayasaka: “I… I just don’t believe it was the work of a traitor.”

Brian: “But…”

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. You’re confident about that, right?”

Hayasaka: “...Yes.”

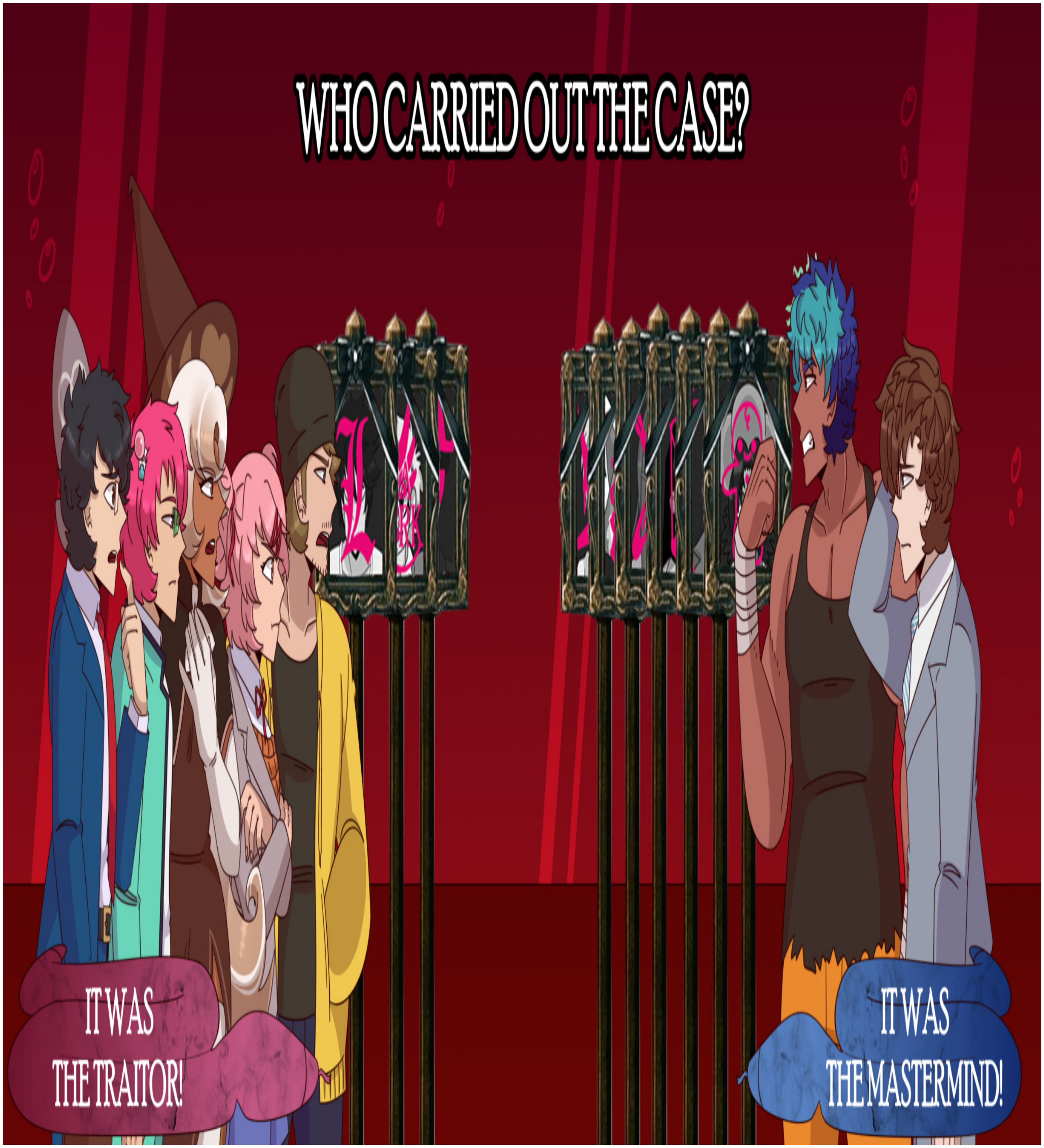
Kurumada: “Then let’s aim first in the discussion and leave ‘em with nothin’. What do ya say?”

Hayasaka: (“The traitor isn’t the killer. Because there isn’t a traitor. There *is* a mastermind. And the mastermind is the killer. That’s right. That’s what I believe. And even if I only have Kurumada on my side, that’s what I’ll prove.”) “...Alright.”

SPLIT OPINION

-WHO CARRIED OUT THE CASE?-

DEBATE SCRUM START


WHO CARRIED OUT THE CASE?
IT WAS THE TRAITOR!
IT WAS THE MASTERMIND!

Kurumada: “Oi, if you’re saying it was a traitor, and they were given all that shit for the case, then how the hell did they transport the **sledgehammer** to the storage room so easily? It would’ve been too heavy n’ large to take with them!”

Brian: “That wouldn’t have been a problem if they were given the **sledgehammer** through the vents by someone on the upper floors!”

Hayasaka: “Yet, it wouldn’t have been safe for the killer to return back to the islands, if they were stained in L’s **blood** . If it was the mastermind, they would be able to return upstairs instead.”

Latte: “However, since they also took you to the beach on the first island, the killer had the opportunity to slip into the hotel to clean off the **blood**!”

Kurumada: “But how would the killer even transport Hayasaka to the beach without bein’ caught by someone searchin’ the **islands**?”

Natsuki: “They must have used that method we talked about before, and snuck past the **islands** when someone was inside a building!”

Kurumada: “But it don’t make sense for the traitor to have been part of the bomb search in the first place! Doesn’t that mean Nesos didn’t care if their traitor died from the **bombs**?”

Jesse: “No, man! Nesos said they already knew where the **bombs** were! They could’a turned them off anytime they wanted!”

Hayasaka: “Even if you say that, why would **Nesos** send a traitor to kill L for the bomb threat if they could just deactivate the bombs themselves?”

Saiki: “ ***Nesos** must have been targeting L for a different reason then* .”

Hayasaka: “S-Still… The idea of a traitor is all just a **theory**! Do you really believe anyone would want to work with Nesos?”

Brian: “It’s not just a **theory**. The traitor is real, and they were the one to attack me!”

CROUCH BIND

IT WAS THE TRAITOR :

“This is our answer!”

FULL
COUNTER

BREAK: LOSE!

Kurumada: “Wh… What the hell? How did we lose that?”

Monotora: “What? Just because you’re on team blue, doesn’t mean you’re automatically gonna win! You just got too trigger-happy, didn’t ya? Kehehe.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “...Brian, how could you claim such a thing? We don’t know who attacked you: you said you never saw them. So, why are you now so sure it was this traitor?”

Brian: “It’s just that, the more I think about it, the more I feel that must be what happened. Just like how you remembered L was the one to knock you out, right?”

Hayasaka: (“Huh…? Is… Is Brian calling me out on my lie, or is he really trying to convince me to put his trust in him? Even so…”) “Brian, you don’t understand. Are you aware of what will happen if we go down this route…?”

Brian: “Hayasaka… I think I know why you’re so persistent in wanting the killer to be the mastermind. It’s because you don’t want anyone else here to die, isn’t it? If the traitor is one of us, then when we find that person, they’ll be killed. But, you don’t want that to happen.”

Hayasaka: “...I’m–I’m sorry…”

Brian: “No, it’s okay. I understand how you feel. But, Hayasaka, if you keep denying it… We won’t be able to find the truth. We won’t find out who killed L.”

Latte: “It’s important that we can uncover this case for our own survival, too. Although it can be scary knowing of the consequences, as long as we put our trust in one another, we can come out of this stronger."

Jesse: "It's not like I wanna make Nesos think I'm a pussy or nothing, so I'm gonna keep fighting through this, even if I gotta get suspected again!"

Natsuki: "I don't want anyone else to die either, but the fact *I'm* still alive despite what I did proves there's a chance for things to be different, right…?"

Saiki: " *Don't let the outcome of the trial affect you. You need to focus on saving yourself, too.* "

Hayasaka: "...I… I don't know if…"

Kurumada: "...Hahaha. Nah, we gotta agree with the enemy here."

Brian: "Huh? W-We're not enemies!"

Kurumada: "It was just a figure of speech! We shouldn't fight, we should just… keep working together. 'Cuz no matter what, you'll find the truth eventually, won't ya Hayasaka? So, you gotta make the best of it by aligning with everyone. Maybe the traitor was real after all, and maybe there ain't no harm in believing so."

Hayasaka: "...R-Right. You're all… right. Then, I'm sorry, everyone." ("...Yet, despite what I just said, I don't believe in it at all. As much as I try to take in their words, I still can't accept it. They have no idea how this truly feels. What am I meant to do? I don't know. No, should even I do anything at all? I'm so scared to keep going this way…")

Brian: "Please don't worry about it! I don't know if I would have been ready to move forward without you, anyway. After all, there's still the traitor's identity to uncover."

Jesse: "Why can't we coax some answers outta the tiger? If the traitor's real, they gotta know who it is, yeah?"

Monotora: “Traitor? What does that mean? I’ve never come across that term before in my database of over seven-thousand languages!”

Moony: “Seven-thousand? Hey, then can you speak in Ena-nease?”

Monotora: “Access denied, *rocky* .”

Natsuki: “Ugh, we should’ve seen that coming. It’s not like Monotora’s ever gonna confirm something as big as this, you know?”

Latte: “Are there any clues from the case we’re left with that we can use?”

Kurumada: “We’ve run our evidence list dry at this point. And I’m gettin’ real tired of ‘going over the case one more time’.”

Brian: “W-Well, um… We do who it *can’t* be. The traitor can’t be me nor Hayasaka, like we discussed before.”

Moony: “And it isn’t me, either!”

Saiki: “ *No one was thinking about you as a candidate in the slightest* .”

Jesse: “Do you really not remember seein’ nothing at all when you got attacked, Brian? You must’a caught a glimpse of something.”

Brian: “I really wish I did, but with the way they attacked me, I never got to see them. And, considering they ran away when Hayasaka rushed onto the floor, they could’ve just waited somewhere to join up with the rest of the group when they were all messaged to come to the infirmary.”

Natsuki: “Actually, isn’t that kinda weird how they just ran away? Wouldn’t it have been easier for the traitor to just attack both Brian *and* Hayasaka?”

Hayasaka: “Wait a moment… That is odd. Since we were all involved with the vent experiment to a degree, it’s not as if they couldn’t have used it as an excuse to attack me as well. Not only that, but I’m not much of a threat to…”

Saiki: “...?”

Latte: “I wouldn’t say that, Hayasaka. I believe the traitor was instructed to hurt only Brian. They might have gotten in trouble if they were seen.”

Kurumada: “Jesus, they really had it out for him, eh?”

Jesse: “So does that mean we literally have no clues to help us figure out who the traitor is?”

Brian: “Maybe… Maybe… Oh! How about the alibis? I don’t think we ever finished talking about them properly.”

Natsuki: “In what way? Even though we know where everyone was searching, we still don’t have a time of death for L.”

Monotora: “I could tell you if yer want! Oh, but you just have to cough up 100 monocoins for it!”

Saiki: “ *That’s just scalper pricing, you con* .”

Brian: “Although we don’t have an exact time, we did figure out that L was killed some time after Saiki teleported away to the first island. So, we just need to find out where everyone else was during that point, and who would have been most likely to have gone to the fifth island.”

NON-STOP DEBATE

Brian: “When Saiki teleported to the first island, where was everyone?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t recall the exact time I did, but it was a few hours into the bomb search* .”

Natsuki: “Me and Jesse were still on the first island. I mean, you should already know that, because we were the ones to run into Saiki!”

Jesse: “And we were together for the rest of the night. We even took turns keeping watch while the others took a nap!”

Natsuki: “Y-You weren’t supposed to ever mention that part, dummy!”

Saiki: “ *Too late, it’s out in the open. Now everyone knows how lazy you two really are* .”

Jesse: “We’re not lazy, yo! We just needed a pit-stop!”

Kurumada: “If ya really needed more people, you should’ve just gotten me!”

Natsuki: “I-It doesn’t matter now! Just–Just keep going!”

Kurumada: “Well, not much I can say for me. I really was on the second island the whole night.”

Latte: “As was I on the third island! Oh, but if we all have accounts, then what do we do now?”

Brian: “Um… Well… That would mean the discussion is over, right?”

…

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “...”

…

???: (“...He’s not saying anything. That’s… strange. Come to think of it, he hasn’t spoken in a while. Is everything alright…?”)

…

Brian: “...O-Okay, so, erm… We know the traitor had to have come to the storage room soon after Saiki left. And if Saiki was with Natsuki and Jesse for the rest of the night, then it would be unlikely for the traitor to be any of those three.”

Natsuki: “Thank god…!”

Brian: “And then… Er…”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Latte was with Moony, eh? So that means they can vouch for each other that they were together the whole night too.”

Latte: “Oh, that’s right! Thanks for that, Kurumada.”

Hayasaka: “ *Why the hell would you say that* …?”

Kurumada: “...”

Jesse: “Wait, so who does that leave?”

Hayasaka: “...”

…

…

…

???: (“I don’t know what’s going on with him right now. He’s acting very weird. He doesn't speak for so long, only to ask that? And why has he gone back to being quiet again? … *Oh* . Maybe… he doesn’t know. Then… it’s better if I do it for you. You shouldn’t have to say it yourself, that’s not fair on you.”)

…

Brian: “...It’s Kurumada.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...Eh? Me?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Latte: “Wait, are you sure?”

Brian: “He’s the only one left not accounted for that was alone during this time.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, but I was on the second island. How was I supposed to get to the fifth without anyone seeing me?”

Brian: “The fourth island was empty ever since Saiki left it. You actually had the opportunity to travel through it without being caught.”

Kurumada: “It wasn’t empty. Monotora was there.”

Brian: “But would Monotora care if the traitor walked past them?”

Kurumada: “...”

Natsuki: “That was a bit of an obvious question.”

Kurumada: “Huh. Yeah. My bad.”

Saiki: “ *Your bad? You’re being suspected here.* ”

Jesse: “You’re not gettin’ mad, yo? I mean, you’re the prime suspect now.”

Kurumada: “...Heh. Is that so?”

Moony: “He’s acting way too chill. I think he’s gone insane. Maybe all that protein poisoned his brain or something.”

Natsuki: “Yeah, this feels… too easy. Are we sure it’s Kurumada?”

Brian: “It has to be. He’s the only one, according to the alibi.”

Latte: “But, Kurumada… He’s been so selfless in this trial. He even broke his tablet for Saiki. If he was the killer, he wouldn’t have done that, surely…”

Jesse: “Hell, guess he was the one to strangle L after all…”

Latte: “And, you’re saying he was the one that attacked you, Brian?”

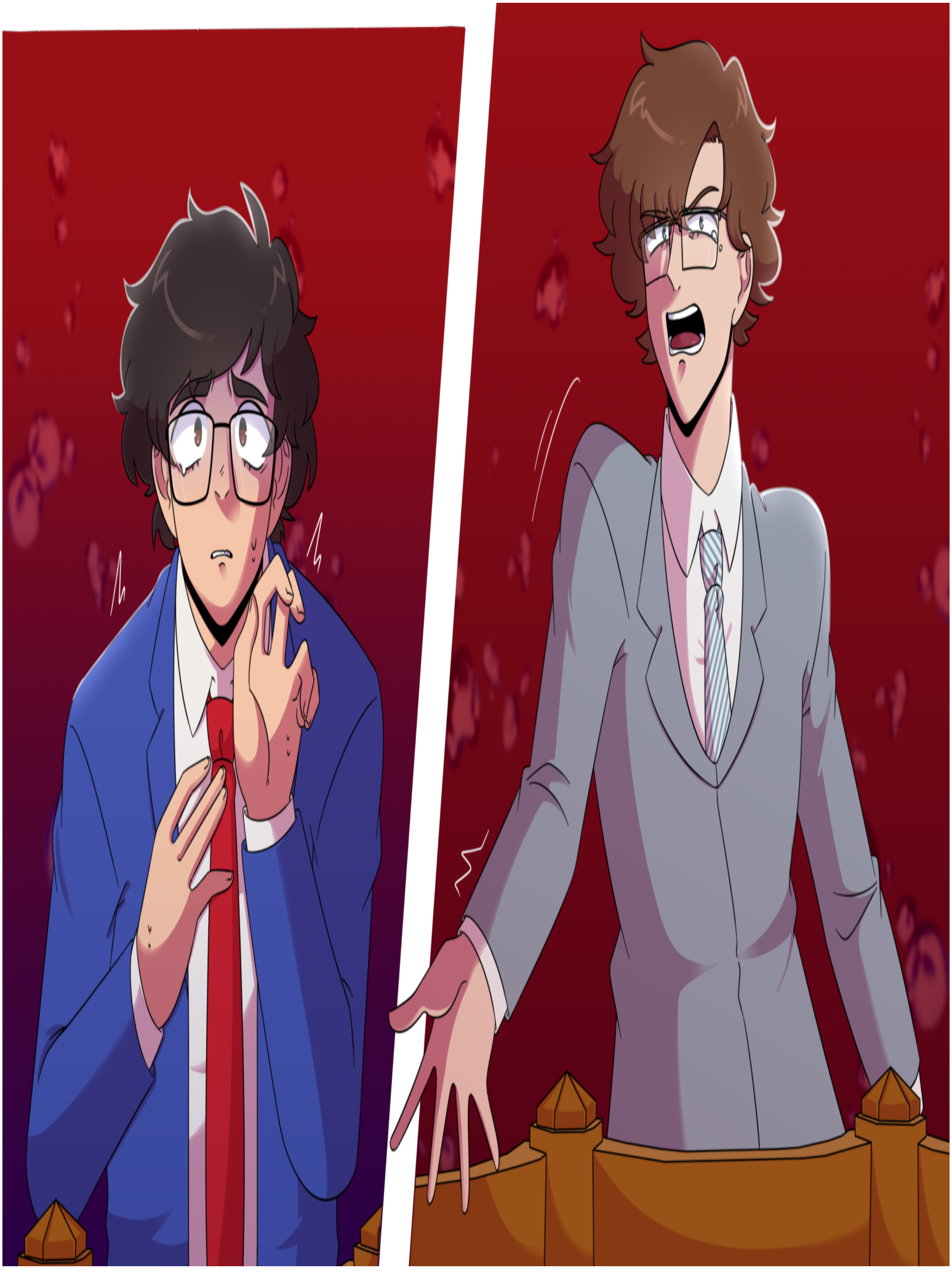
Brian: “...I don’t want to think about it. But, if I have to be honest… a small part of me had been expecting it.”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...Hayasaka. I’m sorry. I know this was something you didn’t want to hear. I know you didn’t want to think it was a possibility, so you became quiet because the only choice was something you deni–”

Hayasaka: “ *Shut up* !”



Brian: “H-Hayasaka…?”

Hayasaka: “Shut up! Just–Just shut up! Shut up! Shut up shut up shut up!”

Brian: “I-I-I’m sorry, I–”

Hayasaka: “Sorry? *Sorry* ? How could you be sorry? The one thing we didn’t have to do, yet you did it anyway! Like an idiot!”

Brian: “W-What’re you talking about? What thing…? I thought you didn’t know that–”

Hayasaka: “No! *No* ! As if I want to hear excuses…! You’ve… You’ve screwed it! You’ve ruined *everything* !”

Brian: “I… *A-Ah* …”

Latte: “Hayasaka! Please, calm down! What are you doing?! This isn’t like you to lash out at your friends like this!”

Jesse: “Hell, I thought Mr. Hayasaka would get upset at you suspectin’ Kurumada. Not… *mad* .”

Kurumada: “ *Oi* . Let’s not escalate this shit. It’s my fault this is happenin’. I had to give a push in the right direction, or else he would’ve never spoken up.”

Natsuki: “Eh? What do you mean?”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka wasn’t denyin’ nothing. He knew it for a while. Didn’t ya?”

Hayasaka: “Stop *talking* , Kurumada.”

Kurumada: “Heheh. C’mon, y’know I can’t take ya seriously when you're mad at me like this. It’s cute.”

Saiki: “ *That’s just inappropriate to say to him right now, you know* ?”

Kurumada: “Eh, couldn’t help myself. Oi, Brian.”

Brian: “Huh…?”

Kurumada: “Lemme snap him outta it. Hayasaka doesn’t hate ya. It’s just a bit tougher than you thought.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“Why is he still talking…? Stop talking. Stop talking. Stop talking stop talking stop talking stop ta–”)

Kurumada: “Bwahahaha!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?”

Kurumada: “Wait, so, lemme get this straight. Ya think *I’m* the one who killed L? *I’m* the traitor? *I’m* the one workin’ with Nesos? I hate those damn bastards with my life! I’m surprised I haven’t been punished for all the shit I say about ‘em!”

Natsuki: “Well, you do bad mouth them a ton, for sure…”

Latte: “And I can’t see what you’d gain from working with such a horrid company…”

Jesse: “I guess I didn’t think someone as beefy as you could’a fit in those vents.”

Kurumada: “Exactly! Exactly! Ya get me, don’t ya? I’m on ya side. I mean, heh, just think about the way L was finished.”

Saiki: “ *Strangulation by rope…* ”

Kurumada: “Now, why would I go ahead and do that? I could’a just strangled him myself if it were me.”

Natsuki: “That would only make you appear the most suspicious, wouldn’t it? Plus, we already cleared before that bare hands weren’t used.”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada, what are you doing…?”

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. What do you think? Did I strangle L with that rope?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada… you’re not–”

Kurumada: “I won’t go down without a fight!”

INTERJECTION

Hayasaka: “Y-You… You can’t possibly be–”

Kurumada: “Ah, come on! I see that spark in your eyes! Ya wanna tell me I’m wrong? Then you gotta tell me with your words!”

Hayasaka: “ *Kurumada…* !”

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN

Kurumada: “We know Nesos ain’t idiots. If I was their traitor, they’d know what I’m capable of. Weapons wouldn’t even need to be used with muscles like these!”

Hayasaka: “It–It doesn’t matter! What you’re saying is just nonsense! Nesos gave the traitor the sledgehammer anyway!”

Kurumada: “Even if they were given it, they never used it! Not like the rope, though, eh? ‘Course, you said it yourself, **the fray was proof it was used to strangle L**!”

MULTITOOL

Hayasaka: (“I…!”)

BREAK

Hayasaka: “Ngh… Why? Why do you want me to say these things, Kurumada…?”

Kurumada: “Oh? What do you want to say?”

Hayasaka: “...It’s… It’s the multitool.”

Natsuki: “The multitool?”

Kurumada: “Don’t ya remember? We found that multitool sittin’ in the wrong box.”

Brian: “A multitool…? Wait, couldn’t something like that with its blade be sharp enough to replicate a fray by slicing into the rope?”

Natsuki: “If the multitool was used that way, is that why we found it in the wrong box? Since the lights were off at the time, the killer must have decided to toss it back near its correct box without thinking.”

Saiki: “ *I don’t get why they couldn’t have just turned the lights back on after killing L* .”

Kurumada: “Sometimes bastards get cocky working in the dark.”

Latte: “So, are you saying that the rope was merely made to look as if it was used to strangle L? But then, if that wasn’t used, then what?”

Jesse: “If it ain’t a tool, and if it wasn’t done by hand…”

Kurumada: “Ain’t just got your hands to strangle someone…”

Jesse: “...Huh?! There’s no fuckin’ way! You used your *biceps* to strangle L?!”

Saiki: “ *I guess something like that wouldn’t leave any marks behind* .”

Brian: “But… I don’t get it. Kurumada, instead of trying to prove your innocence, you instead got Hayasaka to prove that only *you* could have committed the crime…”

Kurumada: “Heheheh, hey, ya gotta hand it to me. I’m not that bad with my brain sometimes.”

Hayasaka: “The more you talk, the more I want to *shut your mouth* .”

Kurumada: “Ah… Heh.”

Latte: “Wait, what? Kurumada, you’re not trying to pin the blame on yourself now, are you? Why would you do such a thing? It’s worrying me just how much you’re starting to sound like Mai when she gave herself up…!”

Saiki: “ *More importantly, why did you say that Hayasaka knew this for a while? Considering how hostile he’s acting towards the allegations …*”

Kurumada: “It was just a few moments ago. When I saw his face change, I figured he finally realised it. Hayasaka, wanna tell ‘em what tipped you off?”

Hayasaka: “I… I have nothing to say. N-Nothing. The–The more everyone speaks, the closer we’ll end up *there* .”

Kurumada: “Hey, don’t be like that. If you keep worrying about what happens next, you won’t be able to do anything now. I promise ya, if you open up about it, it won’t hurt so bad. Come on, you can even just stare at me if you’d like.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka: “...I wish… I wish I never realised it… Why the traitor ran away when I came to Brian’s aid – why they didn’t just attack me instead. I-It was because it was someone who didn’t want me to see them doing such a thing…”

Brian: “That…”

Kurumada: “...I s’pose the guy you like finding ya trying to attack his friend wouldn’t be the best look, huh?”

Hayasaka: “Just… Just because you *might* have done that, doesn’t mean you were the one to kill L.”

Kurumada: “Why not?”

Hayasaka: “Because you just *didn’t* .”

Latte: “I don’t want to accept Kurumada as the killer either, but…”

Saiki: “ *It’s not like you to blindly deny something* .”

Brian: “No… Hayasaka’s not blindly denying it. He’s… saying there *isn’t* a reason for it.”

Jesse: “Isn’t a reason for what?”

Brian: “It’s easy for us to say any traitor was instructed under Nesos to murder L. But, we don’t have a specific reason why Kurumada would agree to be the traitor in the first place.”

Jesse: “Then is he bein’ threatened with his life to take their orders?”

Hayasaka: “Ridiculous. All of our lives are being threatened by the death game regardless.”

Natsuki: “What if he’s being paid to do it?”

Hayasaka: “Kurumada wouldn’t need the money. That’s completely out of the question.”

Brian: “Then, do *you* know the reason, Hayasaka…?”

Hayasaka: “There *is* no reason.”

Kurumada: “No, you know the exact reason. You’re the only one who does.”

Hayasaka: “No… N-No I don’t…! I know *nothing* ! *Sob* , I won’t say *anything* !”

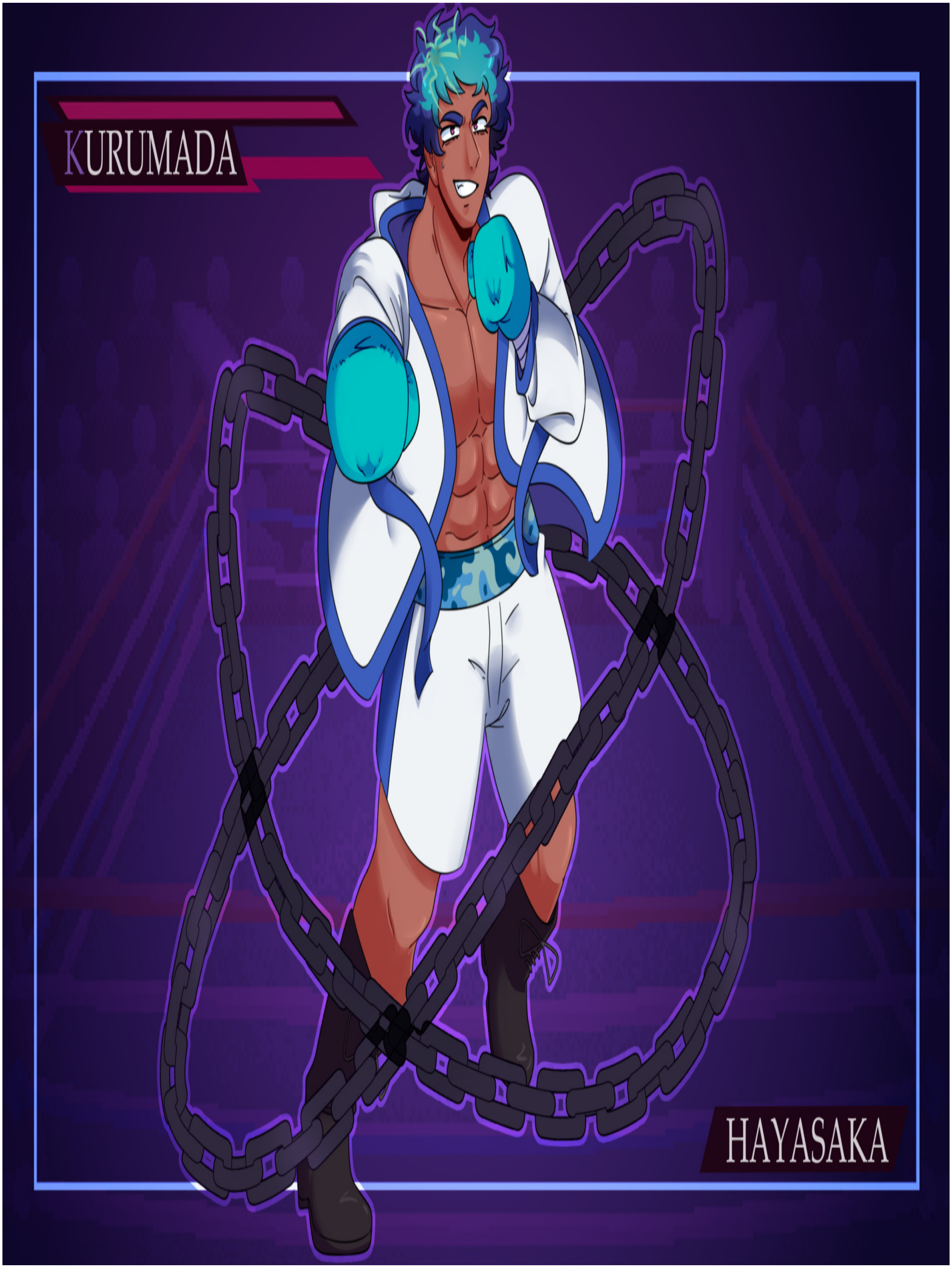
Latte: “Hayasaka…! Don’t overwhelm yourself like this!”

Kurumada: “...Alright. Then let’s fight.”

Hayasaka: “F-Fight…?”

Kurumada: “I can see it written all over your face how much you’d rather hit me, how I’m really makin’ things difficult, right? So, come on! I know you have it in ya, and I don’t mind if we gotta get a bit rough – give it all ya got!!”

ARGUMENT ARMAMENT



KURUMADA
HAYASAKA

Kurumada:

“Ain’t no truth ever got past you, has it?”

“That’s why I can’t help but be proud of ya!”

“C’mon! This ain’t no match for you, Hayasaka!”

ADVANCE

“Hey? Praise not gonna work? I always wonder why you’re so modest.”

“You think I’ll be hurt by your words? Not a chance!”

“Mai never did! She was damn proud of what you did for her!”

ADVANCE

“Accepting I’m the traitor doesn’t mean you’ve lost!”

“Accepting I’m the killer doesn’t mean you can’t win!”

“What I’ve done ain’t a reflection on you! Don’t blame yourself for what you gotta do!”

“Look past the denial, Hayasaka! Just look at me!”

“‘Cuz I realised I *need* you to know the truth I’ve been hidin’ from you for so long!”

“And if I had to lie to you this whole time for that, then that makes *me* the bad guy!”

FINAL BLOW

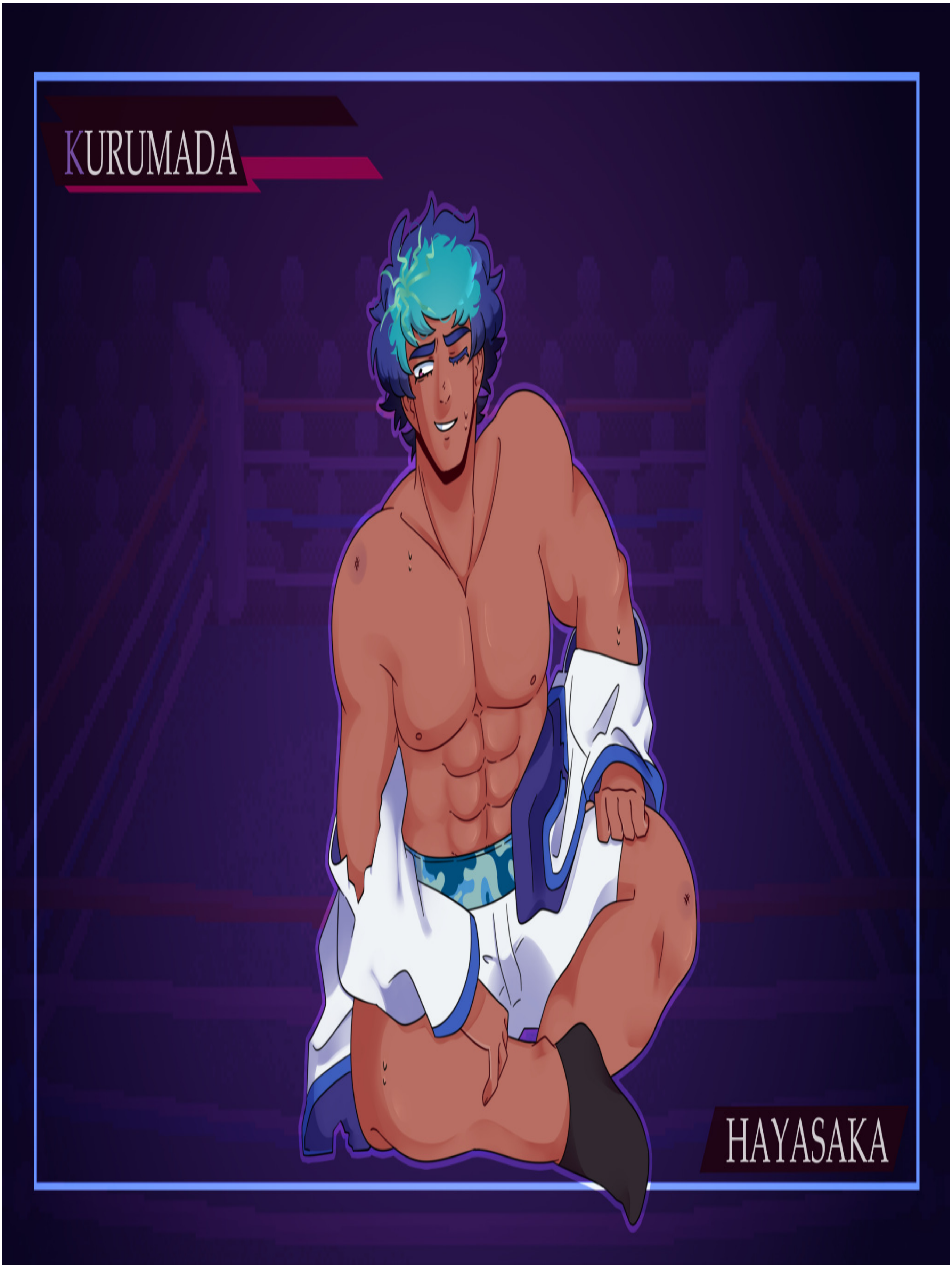
Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. Why am I Nesos’ traitor? Why did I deceive ya all this time?”

TO

PROTECT

LOVED

ONES


KURUMADA
HAYASAKA

BREAK

Hayasaka: “It was for me and Mai. Y-You… wanted to protect us.”

Latte: “You and Mai…?”

Natsuki: “Huh? How could he have been protecting Mai if she got executed?”

Saiki: “ *If he joined them before she died, he might still be in their debt regardless* .”

Kurumada: “Not in their damn debt. Just tryn’a protect the one still here.”

Brian: “The one still here, huh? I see…”

Kurumada: “...Look. I’m sorry for all the shit I put you all through in this trial. It ‘prolly would’ve been best if I just confessed it sooner. But, I guess I was too afraid of what Hayasaka would think, even if I knew he'd realise the answer eventually.”

Hayasaka: “...You lied. Y-You promised it wouldn’t hurt so bad. But… *sniff* , all I can feel is overwhelming pain…”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka… Damnit, I’m terrible. I never wanted to provoke you. It was just the only way I’d ever get you to accept the reality of what I did. I feel… it’s better this way, even if it does hurt. Because… lying to ya any longer would only make it hurt worse, right?”

Hayasaka: “No… P-Please… don’t let it happen… N-Not to you…”

Jesse: “Mr. Hayasaka…”

Brian: “Ah… I’m… I-I’m so sorry! This is all my fault, isn’t it? I-I was focusing on trying to be helpful, yet I…”

Kurumada: “It doesn’t matter whose ‘fault’ it is. No matter what happened, no matter who said it, it was going to be said.”

Hayasaka: “No…! No matter what happens, I won’t let this end! I won’t let this trial end! I’ll never let it…!”

Monotora: “Those are some big, bold words from nothin’ but a fake-licensed doctor! Come on now, even you know that this shit’s wrapping up now. I warned you about this before, didn’t I? You wanted to take this path so badly, and now you have to accept it no matter what!”

Hayasaka: “Shut up…! Go to hell! I-I’ll kill you…!”

Monotora: “Well now, ain’t that rich comin’ from the likes of such a scrawny, flaky *bastard* ? You’re not even worth the pity show!”

Kurumada: “That’s enough outta you, motherfucker…!”

Monotora: “ *Grrr* …”

Kurumada: “...Hey, since L ain’t around to give us a run-down of the case, I wanna entrust Hayasaka to do so instead.”

Hayasaka: “W-What…? No, Kurumada, are you even hearing yourself right now…? H-How can I do such a thing? How could I… be the one to… convict you…?”

Kurumada: “I wouldn’t want it from anyone else. Yeah, it’d make me reflect on what I did, and it’d make me feel like shit, but… I’d be happy I was gettin’ what needed to be done.”

Brian: “What? Y-You’re not serious, are you? Don’t make him do that! You shouldn’t force him to do any more of this! It’s not right!”

Saiki: “ *We should just end the trial now. There’s no point in doing this* .”

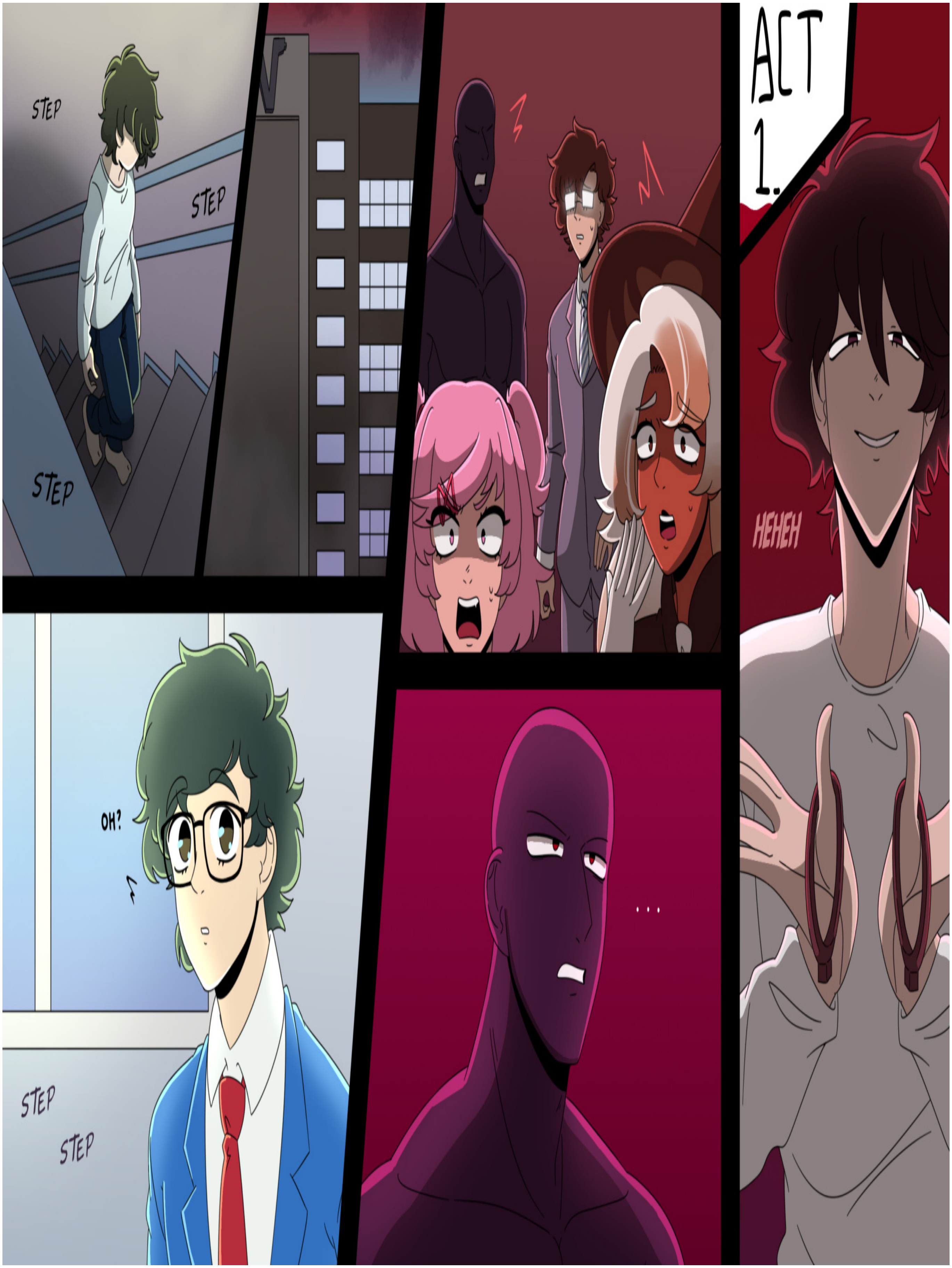
Kurumada: “We can’t end it now. Someone still ain’t entirely convinced.”

Hayasaka: “...”

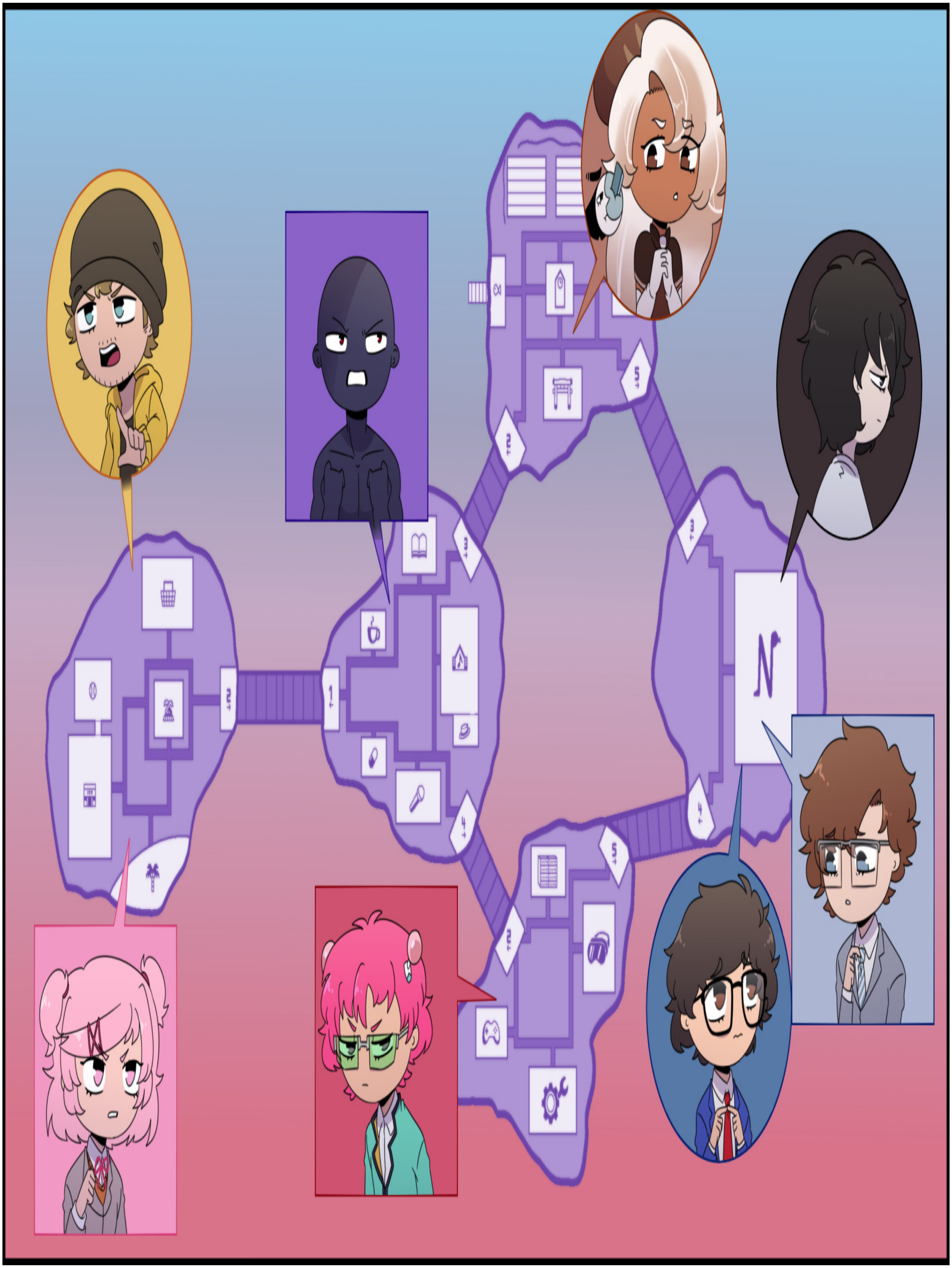
Kurumada: “Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka: “...Y-You’re so stubborn, aren’t you?”

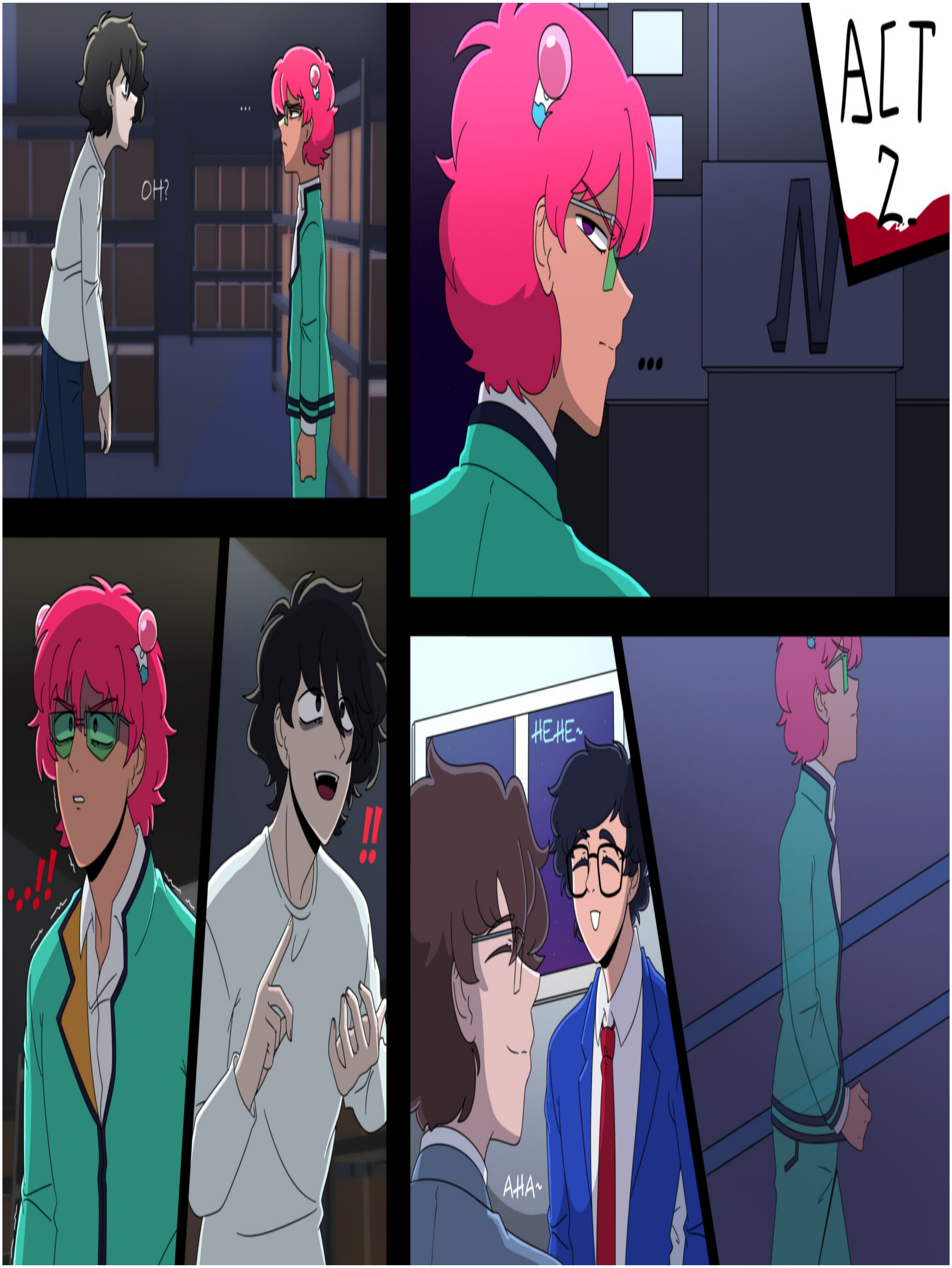
CLOSING ARGUMENT


STEP
STEP
STEP
ACT 1.
HEHEH
OH?
STEP
STEP
. . .

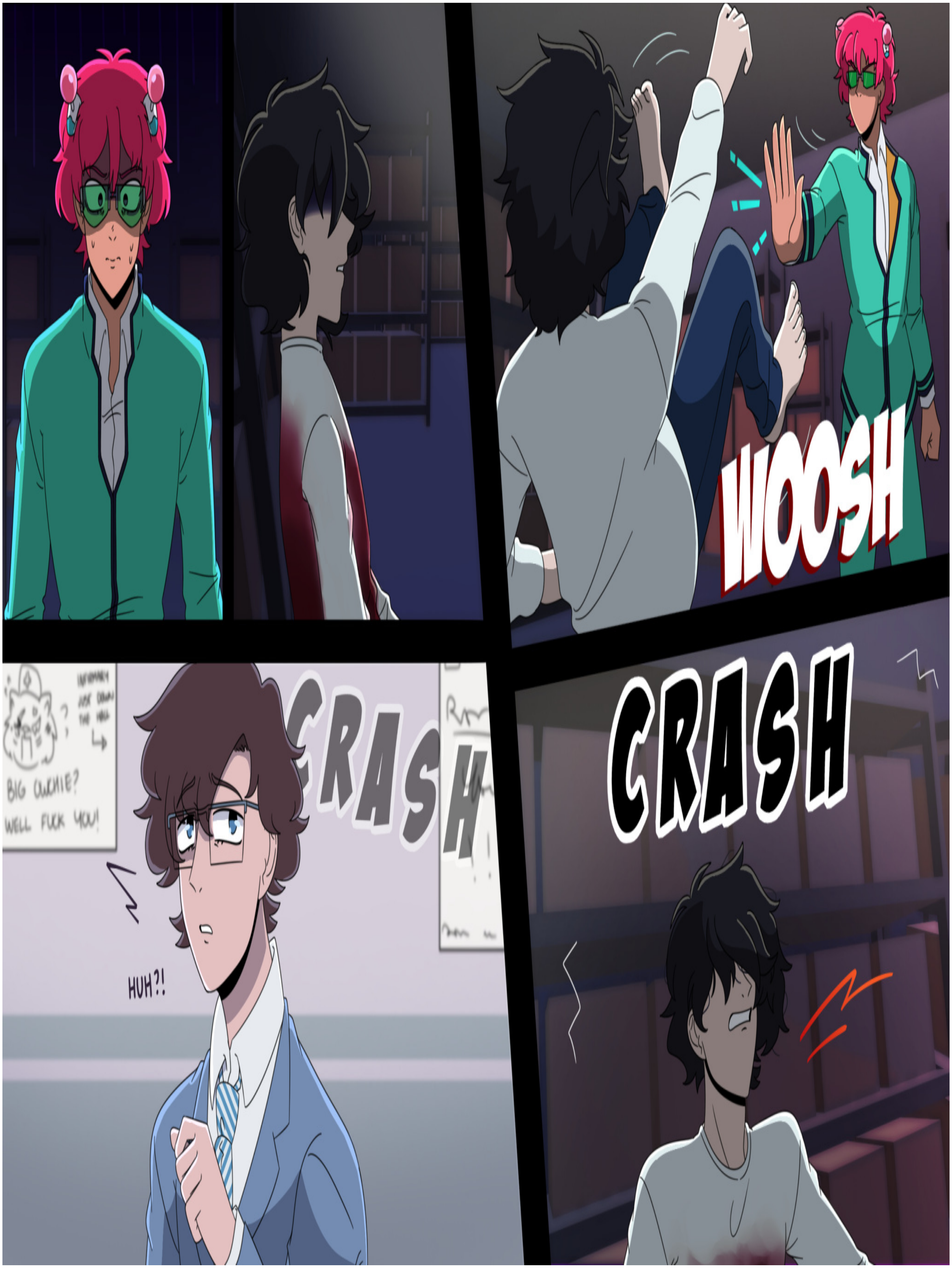
Hayasaka: “Everything began with L’s bomb threat. He claimed he planted bombs somewhere on the islands, stolen and modified from the handcuffs from the third motive to go off in twenty-four hours. However, he offered to defuse them only when the so-called traitor came forth to him at Nesos HQ. After he left, we all split up to go search for the bombs. Brian, who was at Nesos HQ’s infirmary at the time, heard a set of footsteps ascending the stairs nearby – this was L travelling to the storage room where he planned to interrogate the ‘traitor’.”


5
2
3
3
N
2
1
4
4
5
2

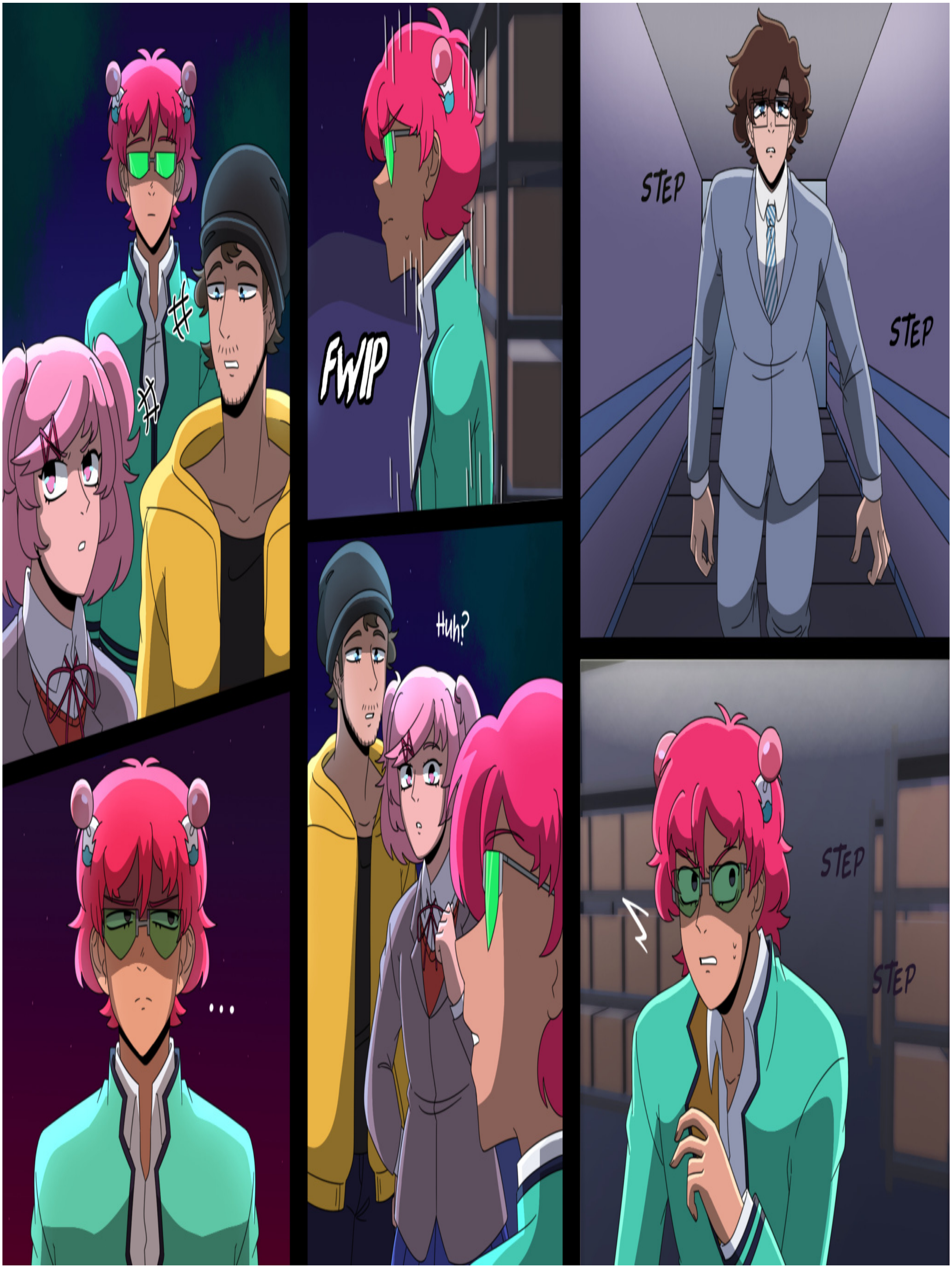
Hayasaka: “As for the bomb search, Jesse and Natsuki stayed to search the first island. K–The–The *culprit* … searched the second island. Latte, with Moony, looked on the third island. Saiki went to the fourth island. That left me, who went to check on Brian on the fifth island.”


OH?
...
ACT 2.
...
..!!
!!
HEHE~
AHA~

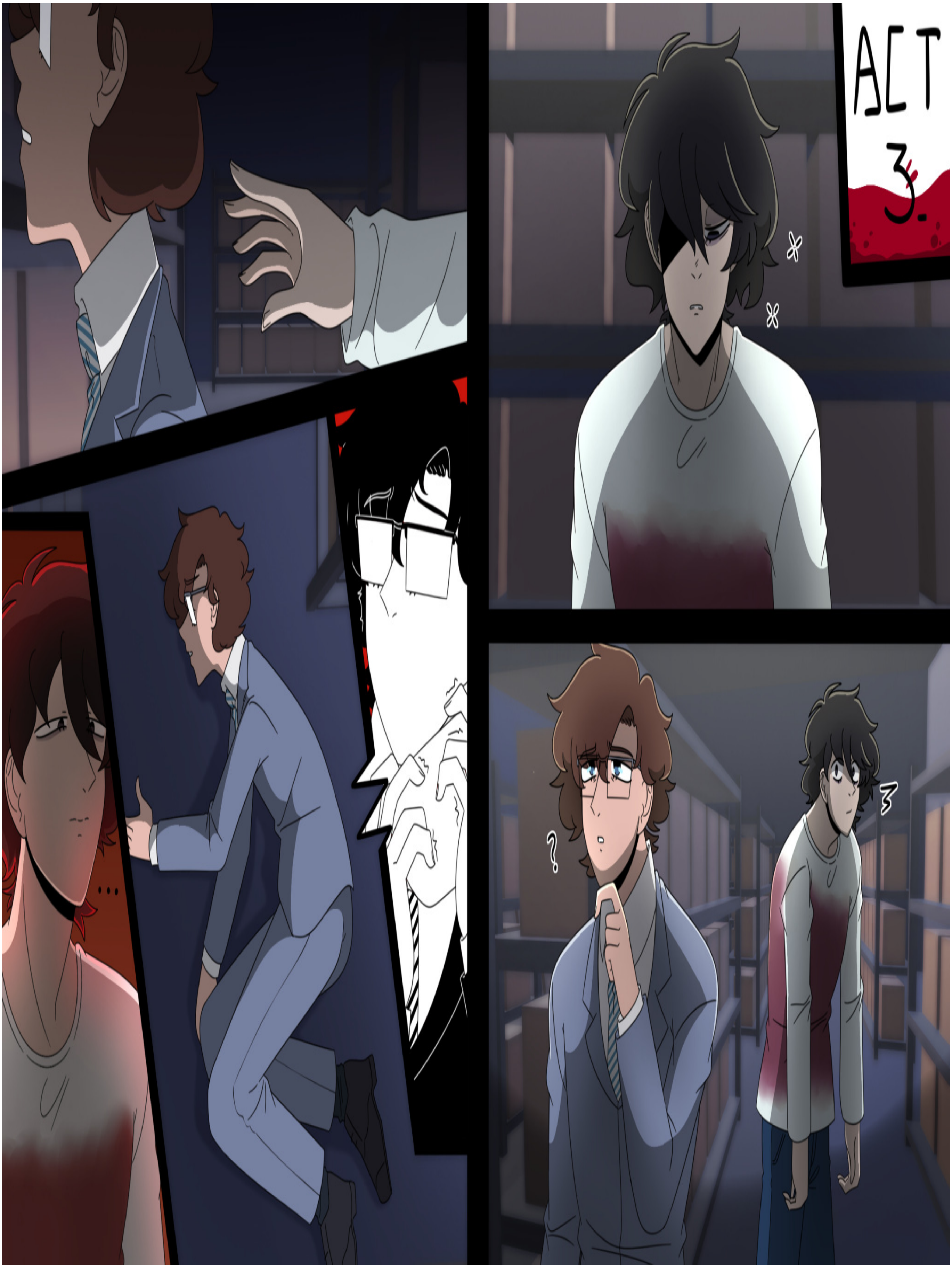
Hayasaka: “Saiki, unlike the others, wasn’t planning to search for the bombs. Instead, he wanted to confront L himself. Using his powers unknown to everyone but me at the time, he used his invisibility to ascend the stairs without Brian or I hearing him from the infirmary. Once he arrived at the storage room, he demanded L for the bomb’s locations. L, for whatever reason, used this opportunity to provoke him.”


WOOSH
INFIRMARY JUST DOWN THE HALL
BIG OUCHIE? WELL FUCK YOU!
CRASH
HUH?!
CRASH

Hayasaka: “Saiki, in anger, used telekinesis on L, and sent him back into the storage shelf behind him. However, due to how strong his blow was, it caused a heavy injury to L’s abdomen. As it left him unresponsive for the time being, Saiki believed he had killed L himself. It was at this time, however, that I had just left Brian in the infirmary, and heard the crash from the impact of the shelf.”


...
FWIP
Huh?
STEP
STEP
STEP
STEP

Hayasaka: “I decided to go upstairs to investigate the noise. Saiki heard my footsteps, and in fear of being caught, impulsively teleported away. He ended up on the first island, where he ran into Natsuki and Jesse. He joined up with them for the rest of the night with an excuse, hoping to put his murder to rest.”


ACT
3.
...
?

Hayasaka: “Unbeknownst to him, Saiki’s blow did not kill L. He had gotten up at some point when I had entered the storage room, and must have spotted me before I could with him. We believe… with how stubborn he truly was to uncover the identity of the traitor, and how he did not want to waste time explaining his currently injured state, L decided to knock me unconscious.”

…

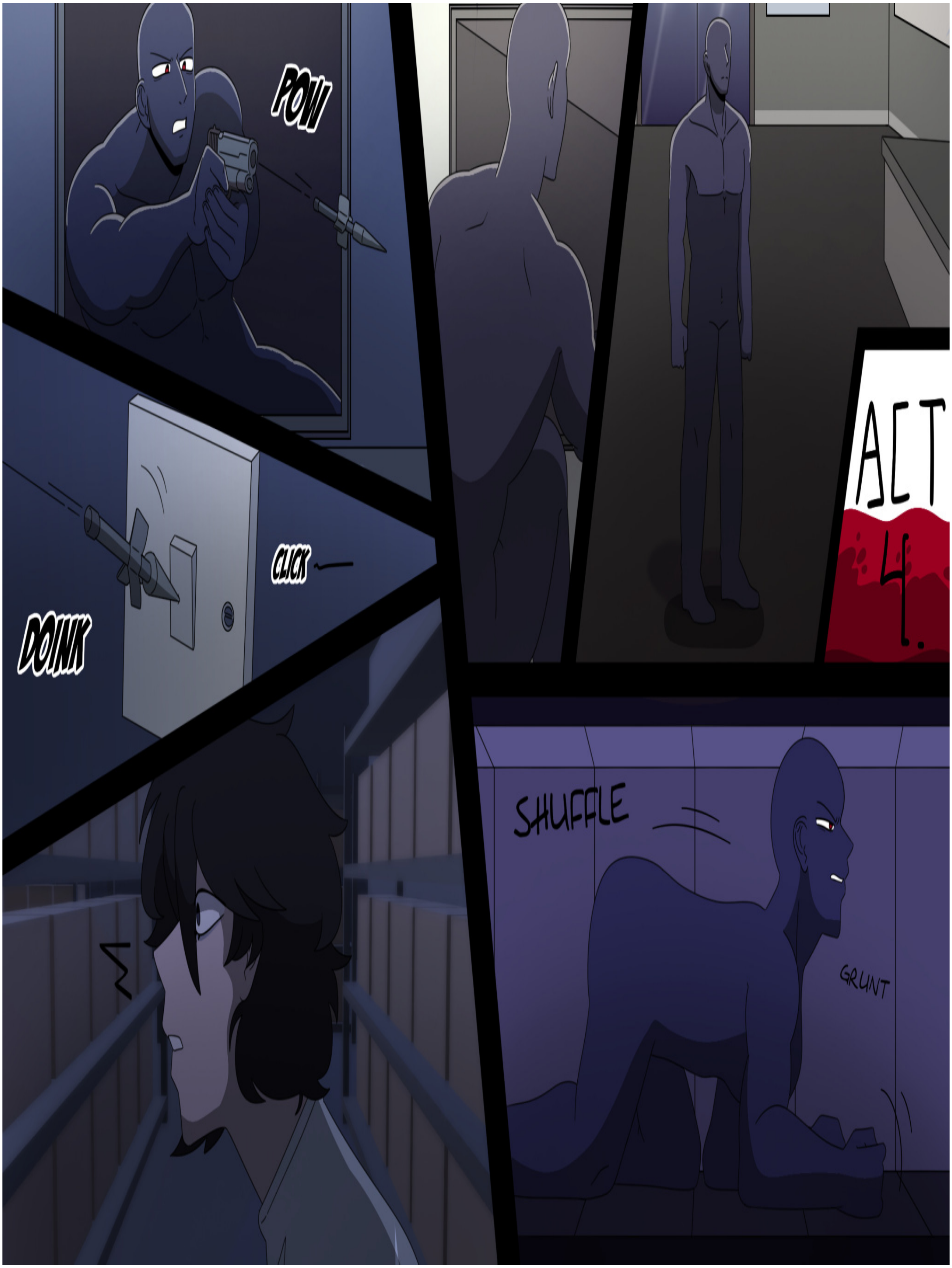
Hayasaka: “Now… Around this time… Is when… W-When…”

Kurumada: “You can do it, Hayasaka. This is when the true culprit comes in.”

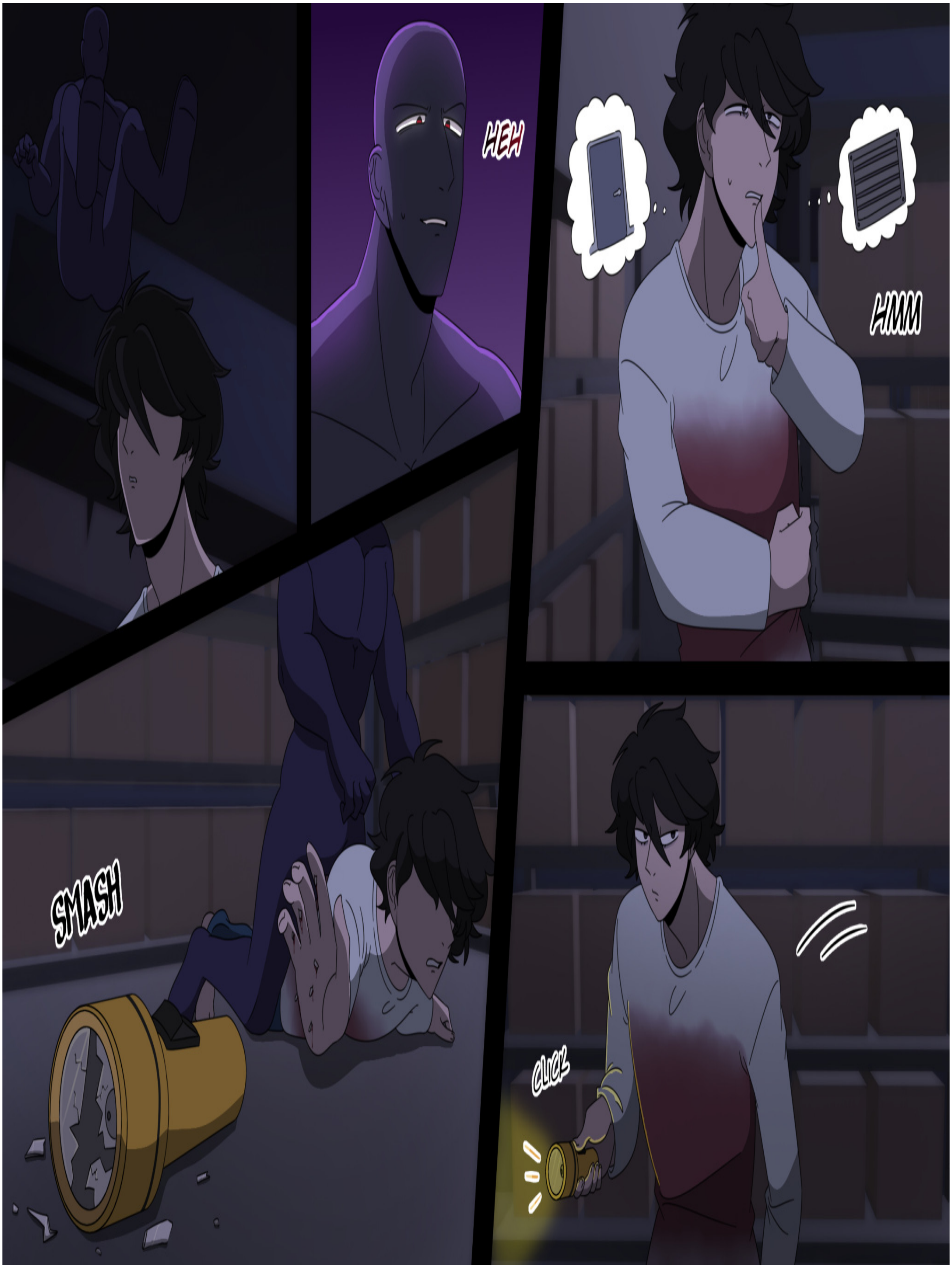
Hayasaka: “N-No… I can’t find the words to even say more. M-My throat is too tight to try…”

Kurumada: “...Hey, It’s alright. You’ve done enough. Here, let me take over.”

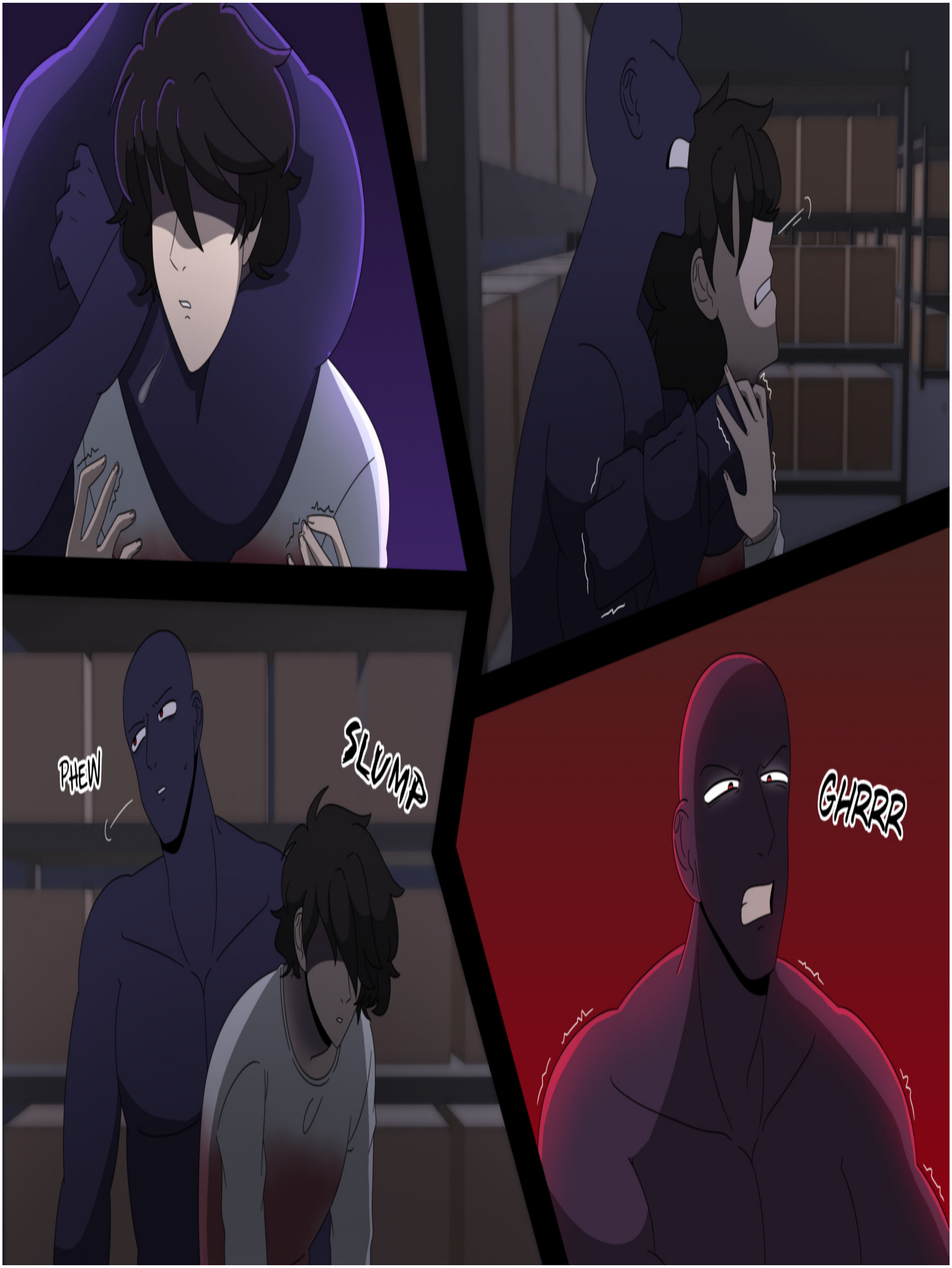
Hayasaka: “...”


POW
CLICK
DOINK
ACT 4.
SHUFFLE
GRUNT

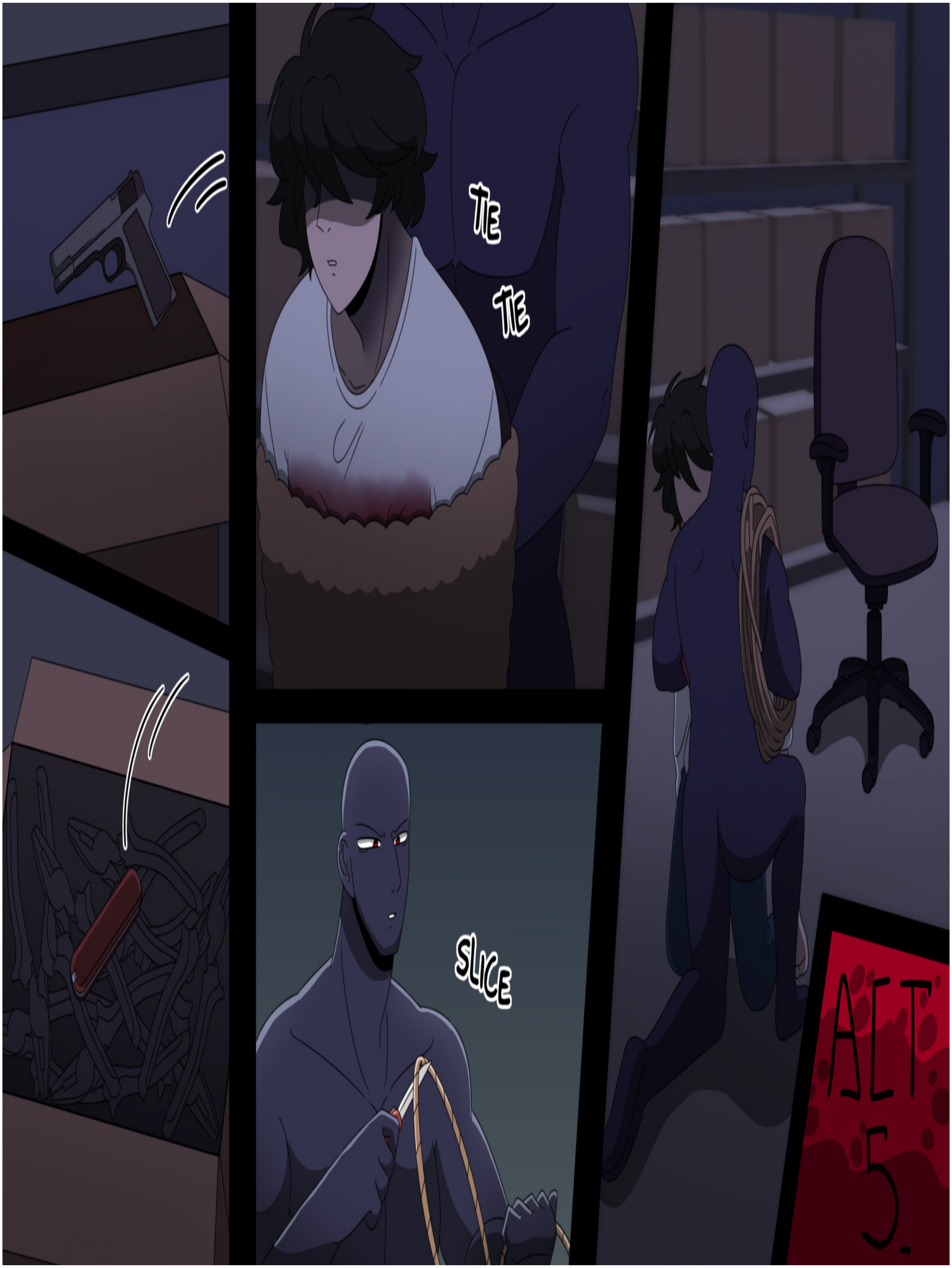
Kurumada: “Around this time is when the culprit – the *traitor* – arrived at Nesos HQ to carry out their order. Lucky for them, the fourth island had been cleared out for ‘em to travel through it without bein’ caught. They couldn’t use the stairs ‘cuz Brian was still a factor, so they climbed through the vents instead. Arriving at the storage room, the culprit took out a dart gun given to them by Nesos. They took a shot across the room at the lightswitch, which turned out the lights in the room.”


HEH
HMM
SMASH
CLICK

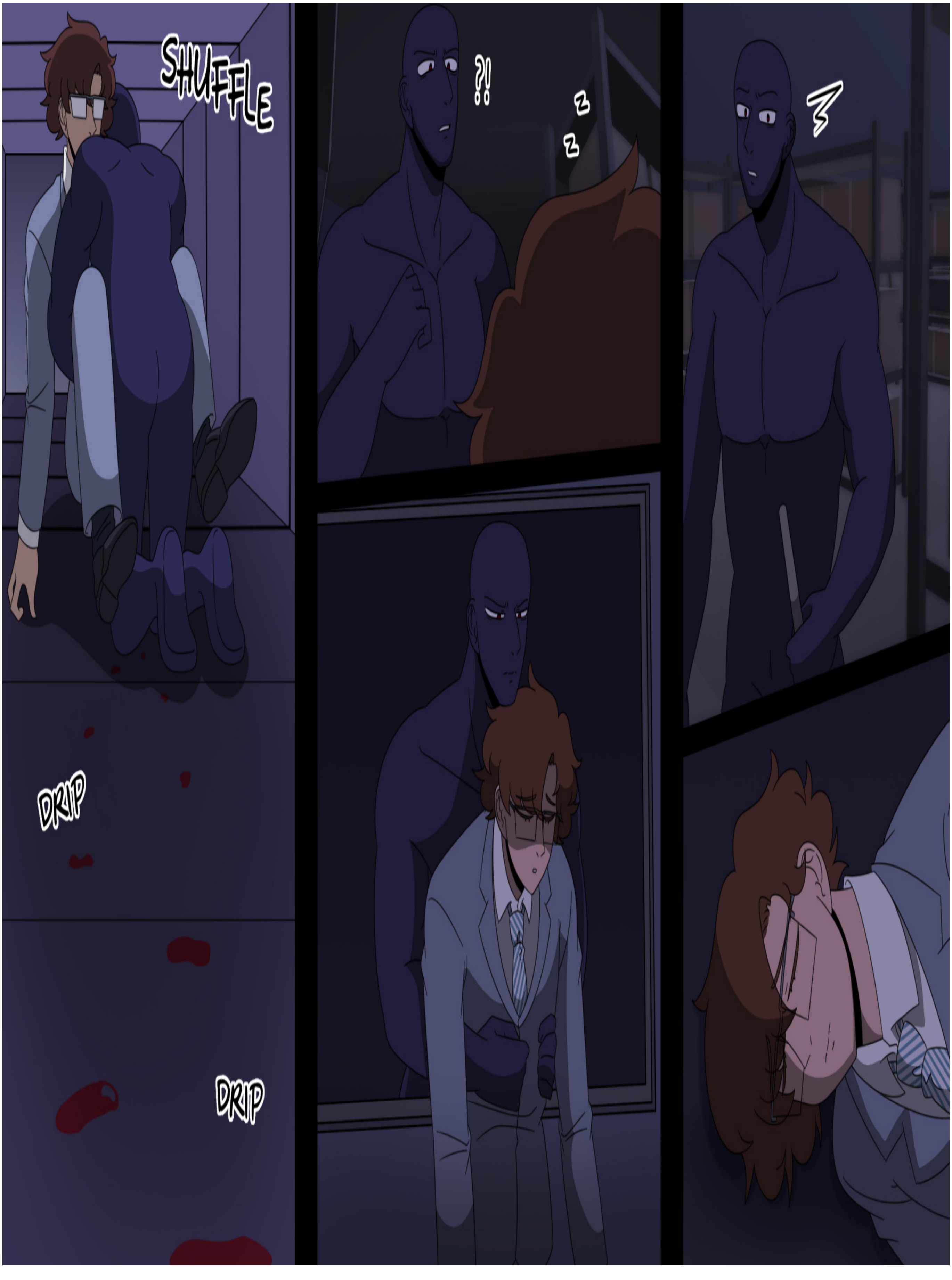
Kurumada: “L was trapped in a logic gamble for where whoever turned the lights out was. With his injury weighin’ him down, he made a choice to travel towards the shelf where the flashlights were. It was just as the culprit was told to expect. Once L was right below them, the culprit jumped outta the vent and pinned him down to the floor.”


PHEW
SLUMP
GHRRR

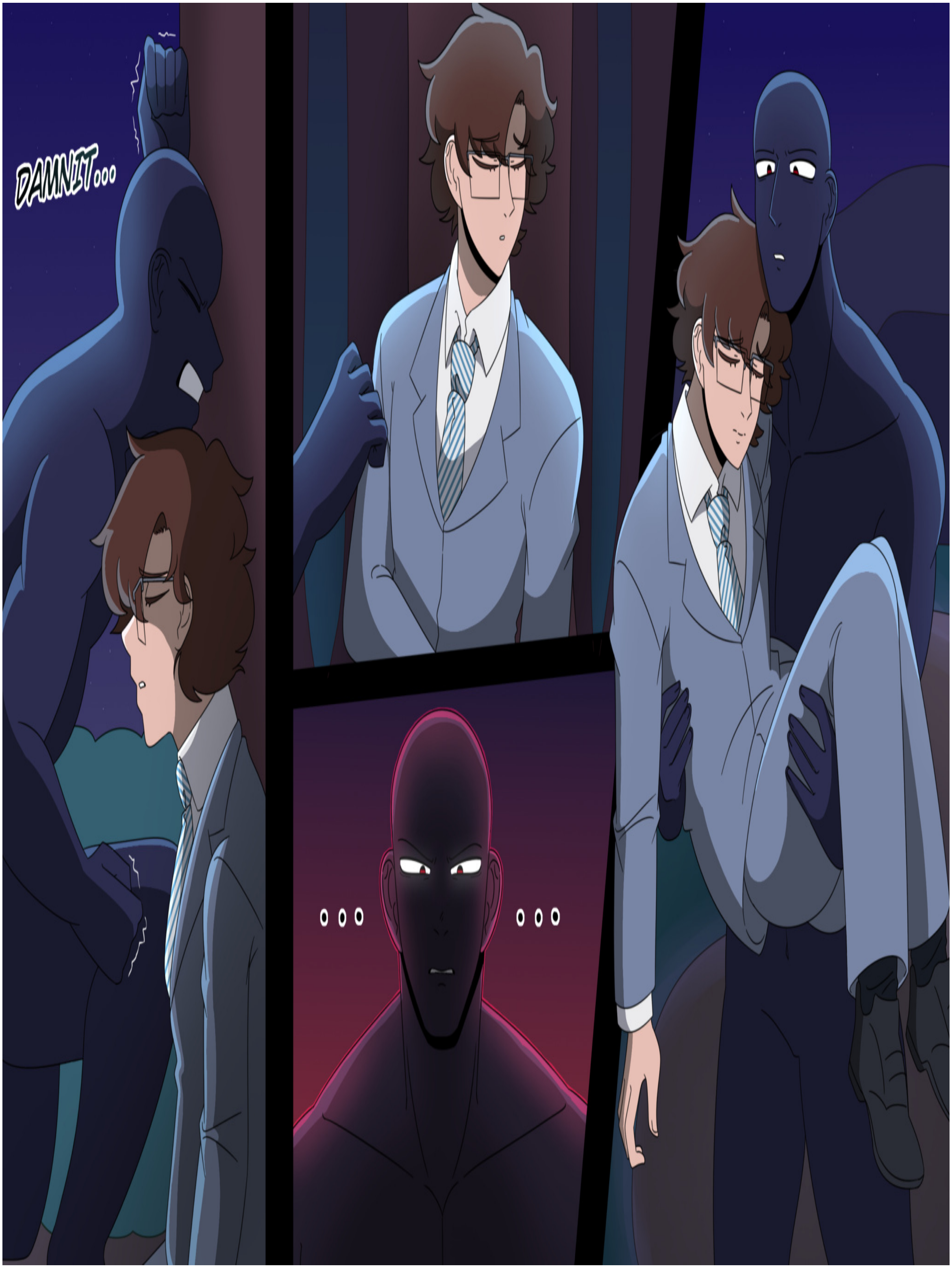
Kurumada: “The culprit didn’t give L much time to react, wrapping their arm over his neck to strangle him. They didn’t stop ‘til they knew he was *dead* .”


TIE
TIE
SLICE
ACT 5.

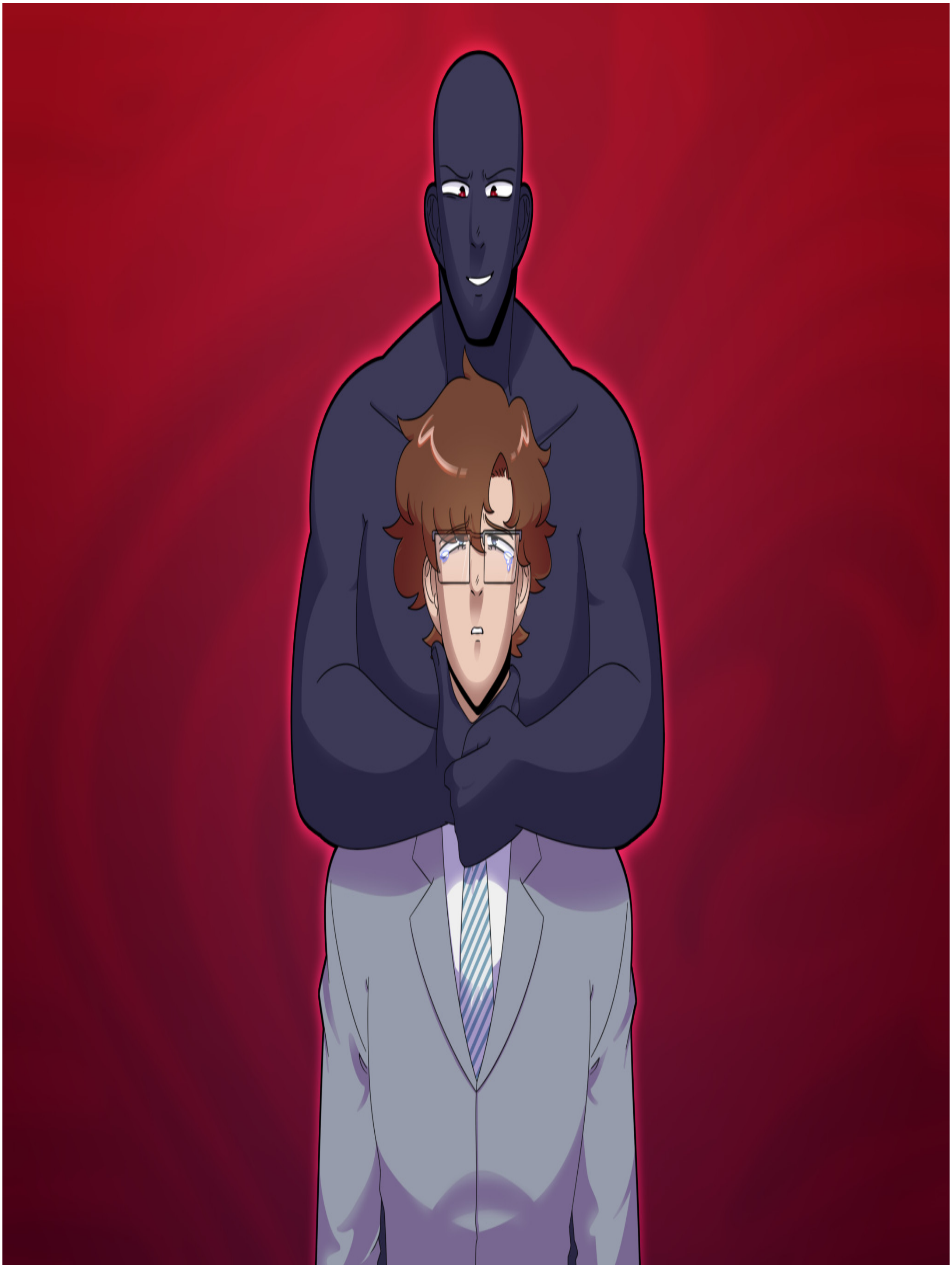
Kurumada: "'Course, they weren't done there. To make it look like L was part of an interrogation scheme about the bombs, the culprit tied him up to a chair. They had to hide the fact they used their body to strangle L too, so they sliced into some rope to make it look like a fray. To ditch their items, they placed the dart gun into the box of guns in the hopes it would blend in. Dumbass that they were, they just had to toss the multitool used back into the wrong box while in the dark."


SHUFFLE
DRIP
DRIP
?!
z
z
3

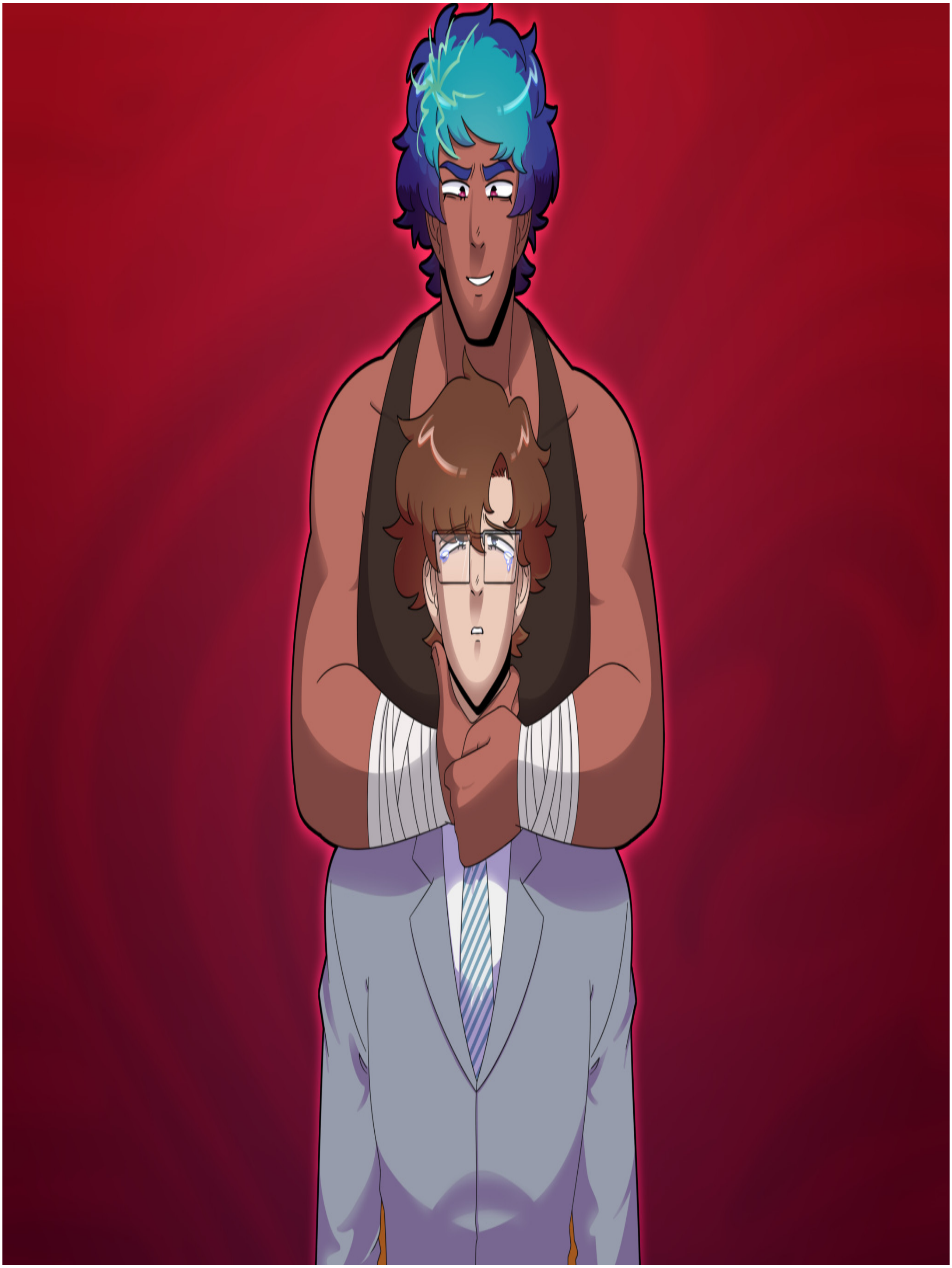
Kurumada: “Now, uh, while doin’ all of that, the culprit had to do a bit of walking around. And that’s when they stumbled into Hayasaka unconscious on the floor. They were confused ‘outta their mind ‘bout what he was doin’ there, but knew one thing: he had to go. So, the culprit took Hayasaka with ‘em through the vents.”


DAMNIT...
...
...

Kurumada: “They carried him all the way to the first island, and ended up placing him somewhere inconspicuous at the beach. After that, they went back to their bomb search like they hadn’t done nothin’. Heh… Still, maybe it was a bit hard to leave him behind knowin’ what they just did with him in the room only a few feet away. Haunts me like no tomorrow.”



Kurumada: “And this culprit, this traitor, that lied to everyone, that lied to the one they were trying to protect, that no-good bastard…”



Hayasaka: “...Was *you* … *Naomichi Kurumada* .”

COMPLETE!

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: (“I can barely see anything in front of me… My eyes are so foggy… I refuse to… believe this is real… This is all a sick, sick dream…”)

Latte: “...”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...”

Monotora: “...This silence is so refreshingly juicy. If I bit down into the air, I’d hear a crunch between my teeth. It’s so different than before. It’s so… *exhilarating* . More so than any other trial has done it for me. I wonder why that is? Ah, maybe from how entertaining it was. Yes, you just made it so fun for me, and I hardly lifted a paw. It’s that loss of reality, that teeter into something not so sane. Maybe… it was just relatable.”

Hayasaka: (“I can’t… move…”)

Monotora: “Well then, let’s move right onto the vote. Somehow, I really think it's the perfect time. Screens at the ready! Eh, and it’s not like Kurumada’s vote’ll matter, even if his tablet *is* broken, kehehe…”

Hayasaka: "..."

Saiki: "...?"

VOTING TIME

EXECUTIVE TRIAL: END!

Monotora: "... *Wow* . Really? Aahahahaha! Someone here *really* wants to be punished, don't they?"

Natsuki: "Eh? What do you mean by that?"

Monotora: "Someone here didn't vote. You know, I don't say the line each time for nothin'. No vote, no life."

Kurumada: "What are you even talking about? You just said ya know I wasn't able to vote, asshole."

Monotora: "No, no! Not you, you idiot! I'm talking about Dr. Disrespectful over there!"

Monotora's piercing claw shot straight ahead, pointing down off their throne, right past everyone's gaze, and directly landing on Hayasaka. Yet, Hayasaka didn't break even a flinch. He was completely still, as if he was just a background prop.

Hayasaka: "..."

Latte: "Hayasaka… You didn't vote…?"

Saiki: " *No. He did vote. Nesos can even check the system to see that a vote was made on his tablet.* "

Monotora: “Like we didn’t know that already. What *doesn’t* count is if the vote was made by, oh I dunno, someone else!”

Jesse: “What the hell do you mean by that? Who else could’ve made the vote for Mr. Hayasaka?”

Brian: “...Wait. It was you, wasn’t it Saiki? You voted on Hayasaka’s tablet for him.”

Saiki: “...”

Monotora: “Exactamundo! And, that just means coffee jelly addict made a vote twice. I get you’re so deprived of attention that you’d want to take up all the votes for yerself, but we don’t appreciate it. Try and be crafty all ya want, but it doesn’t deny the fact that Hayasaka didn’t vote *at all* .”

Kurumada: “Who gives a *shit* ?! It doesn’t matter if he voted or not! A single vote would never stop the result from bein’ me, and you know it.”

Monotora: “It wasn’t ever s’posed to, if only you acted in line!”

Kurumada: “Well that makes two of us, don’t it?”

Kurumada’s almost amused words accompanied by a sharp tilt of his head had Monotora stunned. In fact, it had made the tiger react a lot more than he was expecting by the off-comment. Perhaps it was simply the breaking point of the back and forth, where words were no longer enough to tame the beast’s urge to strike.

Monotora’s eyes darkened, snarling like a real animal ticked off by their insignificant prey getting the upper hand. And when they sprung off their throne, charging straight for their target, Hayasaka felt his body rush back into motion, as if the sight itself gave him the vitality to finally talk again. Or in this case, *scream* .

Hayasaka: “ *Kuru* –!”

The last syllables of the other's name couldn't be uttered out of his throat as it finished as quick as it started. One moment, Monotora was stampeding towards Kurumada. The next, they had planted head-first straight into the aquarium's glass walls, a stark bang echoing into his ears.

And all Kurumada had done was step out of the way.

Clearly, Monotora had been too infuriated in their own world of rage to believe Kurumada of all people would simply opt-out of a fight. They viewed it as a cowardly deed, yet did not come to see how such a deed would be their downfall. Now, either from some sort of internal damage done to their mechanical body, or from the pure shock of being out-witted, their body laid limp against the glass. No one knew when they would wake, or if they would at all. The group's closest threat had been eliminated just like that, but for some reason, no one felt any ounce of relief.

Kurumada: "...Like hell you'll kill him. Damn animal."

Kurumada's now dark complexion glared at the lifeless tiger, only to realise everyone else's eyes were now treating him as the exhibit of the show.

Oh, that was why. In fact, they were still face to face with threat no matter what. The only one who didn't look towards Kurumada the same way was Hayasaka, and yet his chalky blue eyes were the most fixed upon him. He had reverted back to a state of unmoving, adrenaline once again lost to the pipe dream.

Jesse: "So… So, shit. It really was you. You killed L, and you're… a traitor? Jesus, man."

Kurumada: "Heh… I don't believe it myself sometimes."

Natsuki: "Then–Then *why* ? Why are you the traitor?"

Latte: "And how long have you been keeping it a secret from us…?"

Jesse: “Hey, have you been against us this whole time…?! I thought we were all working together! What gives?!”

Despite the growing distaste in the air at Kurumada, he simply tightened his fist with a sigh.

Kurumada: “Look… I’ve never been against any of ya. I’ve just been workin’ with them for my own reasons.”

Brian: “Then… The least you can do is explain yourself.”

Kurumada: “Huh. Wonder how much I can say.”

Kurumada peered back over at Monotora, as if he expected their comatose body to react back. Flicking his eyes away, Kurumada stared hard at the floor. His brow furrowed hard, until he looked around at everyone, at *Hayasaka* . It hardly took him a second to shake his head.

Kurumada: “Gh, fuck it. I’m gonna say as much as I can, even if I gotta endure gettin’ beaten half to death by Nesos to do so. After all, they’ve gotta come down here themselves. Don’t you?”

Kurumada’s final question was directed at Nesos themselves, a challenge for someone to show up now that their beast was out of commission. As the muffled bubbles sloshed against the glass panes, the remaining silence spoke of the company’s answer.

Kurumada: “...Alright then. Heh, I dunno if I’m saying this for my sake, or you guys, or Hayasaka, but… S’not like I have a lot to care about now that I’ve lost.”

Hayasaka: “ *Don’t say that… Don’t say that you’ve lost…* ”

It was Hayasaka’s hoarse words that finally made it out of his throat again. Words he didn’t want to say. Because this wasn’t supposed to happen and he didn’t have the words prepared to say anything.

That didn’t matter to Kurumada, who began to approach his trembling frame. Ever so gently, more so than he had ever known possible from the other, he wrapped an arm around Hayasaka’s shoulders, pulling him close. Kurumada felt so warm. So why did he continue to feel so *cold* ?

Kurumada: “Hey, Saiki. Thanks, uh, for aiding Hayasaka during the vote there.”

Saiki didn’t match his gaze, but he nodded in return. The grounds were quiet, everyone anticipating when Kurumada would begin. Running his free hand through his hair, he took a sharp breath, as if he was still fighting the urge to remain quiet, to let things remain unspoken.

Kurumada: “...I was originally recruited the night after the first trial. That’s when it all started.”

Latte: “So then, your confrontation against Monotora on the first night…”

FLASHBACK

Monotora: “Now then, do we have any other means of defiance?”

Everyone remained silent. Hayasaka felt his heart race so nauseatingly in his chest that he felt physically strained and weak.

Kurumada: “... *Fuck this* .”

Hayasaka: “K-Kurumada?”

Kurumada: “I’ve had enough of this bastard’s bullshit! Ya think it’s alright to go around paradin’ all this?! I’ll fuckin’ sock the daylights outta ya!”

FLASHBACK END

Kurumada: “That was all real. S’what I truly thought about bein’ caught up in some ‘death game’. Though, that ain’t changed much, even now. But, what I didn’t expect was for Monotora to call for me in the middle of the night just after the first trial. They told me to follow ‘em or else they’d bring violence towards me n’ my friends. I was confused, damn angry, but mostly… curious. We walked through the second island: I didn’t get no chance for sight-seein’ though, as Monotora took me straight to the south-west bridge. That’s where I was brought to… the CEO of Nesos.”

Jesse: “CEO? You mean like, the mastermind?”

Brian: “You know the person in charge at Nesos? Who is it?”

Kurumada: “...”

Hayasaka, at the other’s silence, peered up beyond his lenses. He paused at Kurumada’s expression. It was frail, and timid, like a child trapped within their first moral dilemma. It wasn’t like Kurumada at all, like a new man had been pried out of him. It wasn’t like Monotora could stop him from saying it. No, it was Kurumada who was stopping himself from saying it.

Just who the hell was it?

Saiki: “ *It doesn’t matter. They probably never revealed their identity to him, either. Just keep going* .”

Kurumada: “R…Right. Then, uh, the CEO had wanted to talk to me specifically for what I could ‘offer them after watching everyone for some time’. They wanted to negotiate a secret deal. If I worked with them, doin’ what they claimed to be ‘necessary work only someone grounded with the participants could do’, they promised me they’d grant safety over Hayasaka and Mai during the rest of the death game.”

Natsuki: “Safety? What did that mean?”

Kurumada: “Safety from death, basically. I assumed it meant everythin’ from getting murdered by someone, and getting punished for breaking a rule or losing a trial. They said they would make an excuse to keep ‘em alive, and just threaten anyone who’d speak up about it. They’d do all of that, and I’d just have to follow their orders. ‘Course, I wasn’t given any special perks. I had to endure all the motives and trials just like the rest of ya. I'd even be executed alongside everyone else if we ever lost a trial, too."

Jesse: "Are you kiddin' me? That's a pretty crappy deal on your end, man."

Kurumada: "It was never about me. I never cared what happened to me."

At that, Kurumada stroked Hayasaka's arm, a tingling sensation lingering from the friction.

Kurumada: "I just wanted to see Mai n' Hayasaka safe, no matter what. I would've done anything at the time to keep it that way. And seein' the danger they could get themselves in after seeing that first trial, I got nervous. I could'a done it myself, but, once I heard the deal, it got up in my head. I couldn't ignore it. I didn't know if I could do anythin' better on my own. So, I accepted it."

Latte: "What a horrible situation they placed you in, pitting your friends against your moral values."

Kurumada: "Hahaha… I ain't so sure about that. I don't got no moral values. That's why someone like me could accept such a deal. Then again… I have a feeling I was really just approached for my strength more than anything. After all, I don't have much else to offer. But, I sure did have two of my closest friends to offer them. It was perfect bait to reel me in, and yet, I couldn't care less as long as I was getting my end of the bargain."

Brian: "But… In that case, why did Mai die?"

Kurumada: "That… I still don't know to this day. What I felt when I found out she was the true culprit of the case was real, but I didn't think anything would happen. Like they promised, Hayasaka and Mai wouldn't be killed in a trial. Not just that, but I even asked to be partnered with one of 'em during the third motive. That way, I could keep a closer eye on them in case something happened."

Natsuki: "Hang on, you knew about the third motive in advance?"

Kurumada: “Yeah, but it was the only one I ever got to know, and even then I wasn’t ever told about the bomb part of the handcuffs, just the pairs. I just thought, being paired with Mai, would allow me to make sure she wouldn’t get into any harm. I should’ve figured otherwise with how unpredictable she could get. Heh, I never thought in a million years she would’ve broken her own damn thumb to escape her cuff.”

Latte: “...”

Kurumada: “...I didn’t know what to think when they killed her anyway. I thought, I dunno, they were gonna just pick Natsuki instead, but when she got pulled inside that oven… I realised something. At that moment, *I realised my deal with Nesos didn’t mean as much to them as it did to me* .”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “I was overtaken with rage. I just had to know what the hell was goin’ through those fuckers’ heads. After I walked Hayasaka back to his hotel room, I was just running – running like hell trying to find Monotora. I had to confront ‘em, I had to confront Nesos.”

FLASHBACK

Monotora: “...Oh? What’s that now?”

Kurumada: “I can’t handle it anymore, damnit! You said–you said you were gonna protect them! Both of them! You should’ve just killed someone else!”

Monotora: “You’re not the only one who ‘can’t handle it’, y’know? Do ya really think you have any authority here?”

Kurumada: "This isn’t what I agreed to! So why should I even do what *you* want?”

Monotora: “Do I have to remind you that we made a deal here? If you don’t–”

Kurumada: “Fuck the deal! I’m gonna take you down by force! C’mon, you bastard, I’ll fight ya to the death!”

Monotora: “Oh… I see how it is. *You’ll regret those words* .”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “You… threatened to fight Monotora again?”

Kurumada: “Yeah. But it ain’t like those empty threats that went nowhere. No, we fought like *hell* that night.”

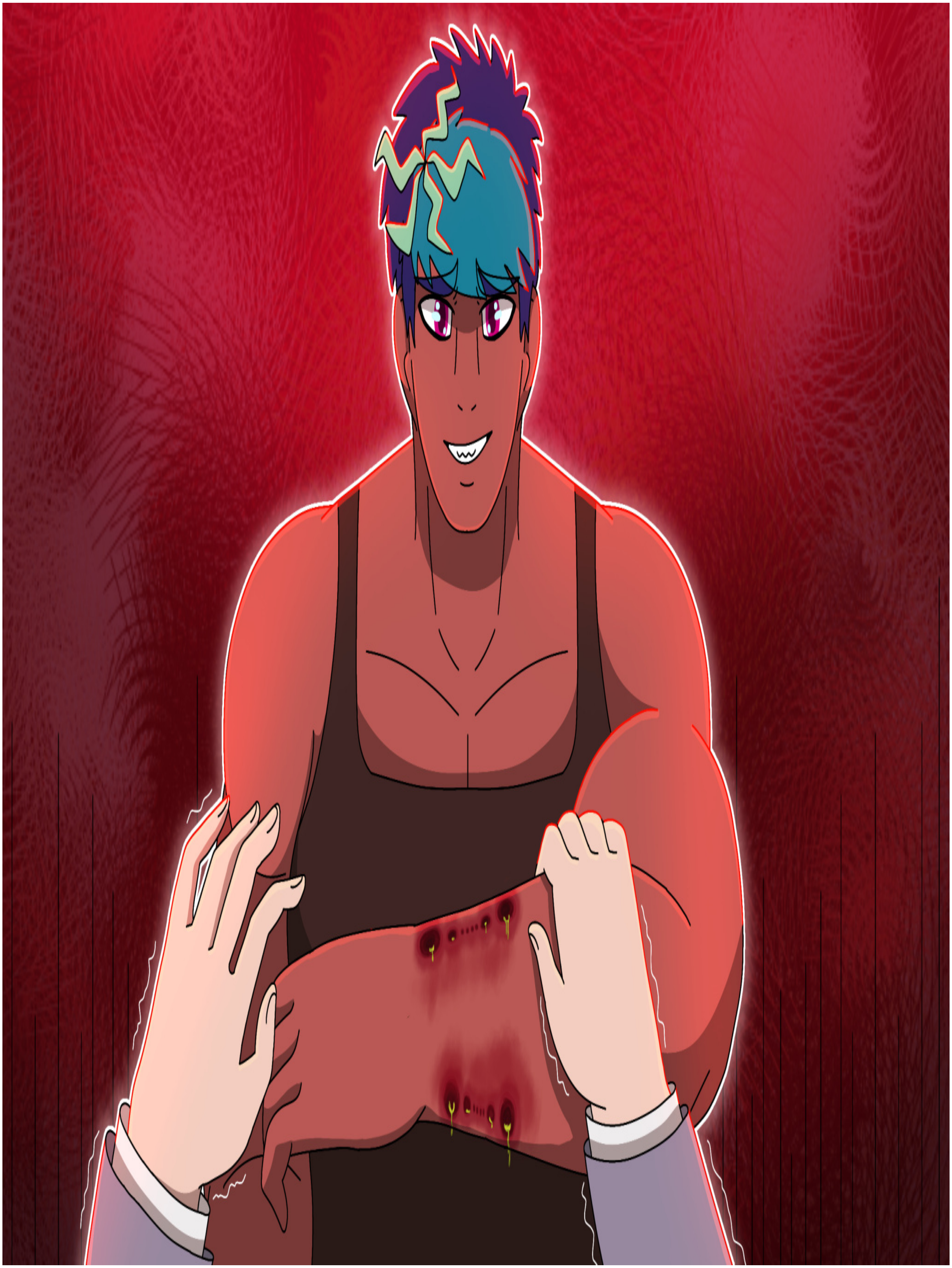
Latte: “W-What?!”

Natsuki: “Are you serious? You really tried fighting them again?!”

Jesse: “Well, still, Kurumada must’a won the fight, right? I mean, he’s right here still, and he didn’t come back to us with an injury.”

Kurumada: “...”

As Hayasaka felt the arm over his shoulder regretfully slip off him, a shiver overcame his body. He watched, in horror, as Kurumada slowly reached for his own arm, unwrapping the bandages on his wrist. Every coil removed exposed more and more of his skin, and more and more of what Hayasaka could only dread to see. Because it was terrible, disgusting, vile, and *nasty* .



Hayasaka: “A-Ahh… Kurumada… What is… this…?”

His hands were shaking, but Hayasaka needed to hold his wrist. He needed to grip his fingers into him as if his touch would do anything. He needed to believe it was able to be healed in its unhealable state. The bite was deep, the holes left behind were wide. The skin around was taut, dark, and fragile. There was nothing he could do with just his hands alone. Yet, he held on for dear life anyway.

Hayasaka: “W-Why… Why did you not tell me about this…? I could’ve… helped you…”

Kurumada: “You n’ I both know why, Hayasaka. I’d have to explain where I got this from, and why I was fighting Monotora in the first place.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “The only thing I could do was hide it from everyone. I wasn’t the best at patching it up m’self though, and the wound still opens and bleeds from time to time.”

Brian: “W-Wait, then, the blood from the vents wasn’t blood from L, but… from you?”

Kurumada: “...Yeah. It just had to start bleeding again right when I was leaving, didn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “N…No… Then… When we found that blood on my hand during the investigation, it wasn’t from searching the vent, or when I touched L’s neck… Because those places had dried blood, didn’t they…?”

Kurumada: “...Some blood must’a got on you while I was carrying ya through the vents. Guess no one had noticed it until then. Speaking of which, Hayasaka, you were… very light to carry. It’s not a means of skipping meals anymore. I need you to eat more in the future.”

It was so ridiculous what he just muttered. So ridiculous, that Hayasaka’s grip on his arm only tightened further.

Hayasaka: “T-Trying to take care of me, as if you’re not the one with the injury here…”

Natsuki: “...Hey. Um, if you lost the fight with Monotora, then did that mean you still had to work for Nesos?”

Kurumada: “Like hell I was going to stop. I was only planning to go harder on Nesos to pressure them into protecting Hayasaka. He was all I had left, so I wasn’t messing around anymore.”

Jesse: “So Nesos gave you those two tasks, right? To attack Brian and kill L?”

Kurumada: “...Yeah.”

Brian: “You… were only ever instructed to attack me, right?”

Kurumada: “...”

Brian: “O-Oh… Oh *god*... ”

Kurumada averted his eyes to the floor, but it didn’t reprimand the damage of his silence. Brian’s face had been wiped over with terror. He was at a loss for words. Hayasaka watched as he slightly slid a step backwards from Kurumada, as if he would still have the means to lash out at him.

Kurumada: “Look… It wasn’t personal.”

Brian: “W-Wasn’t personal…? Y-You were the one who did this to my leg this whole time. You even acted like you wanted to help me. Is that all you have to say…?”

Kurumada: “...You’re damn lucky I’m a coward, you know? If Hayasaka hadn’t been the one to show up, I wouldn’t have ran. As much as I was doin’ it for him, I was too afraid to ever let him see what the hell I had to do to keep him safe. Even if that meant havin' to hurt the people around him."

Brian: "..."

Hayasaka: "..."

Latte: "Kurumada, how could you say such a thing? How could you accept hurting your friends like that so easily…?"

Kurumada: "'Cuz we're not friends. We weren't friends when I accepted the deal."

Saiki: " *I wonder if you ever saw us as friends* …"

It looked as if Kurumada wanted to say something else, but grit his teeth as he continued on.

Kurumada: "...After screwing up my task with Brian, I was lucky for Nesos to let me off the hook. 'Course, then came L's bomb threat as I was waitin' for another order, and as I made my start searching around the second island, Monotora came to me. They told me the plan on how I was going to kill L in the storage room, n' gave me the dart gun in advance."

Natsuki: "Did you really do everything we figured out in the trial?"

Kurumada: "Just about. I was instructed to do everything: the vents, the lightswitch trick, even luring L over so I could pin him down. Once I got him in a chokehold, I expected to receive more of a fight from him, to be honest. I was told L ain't as weak as he looks."

Jesse: "It must'a been his abdomen wound weighin' him down. Dude probably didn't have a lot of energy to fight back at that point."

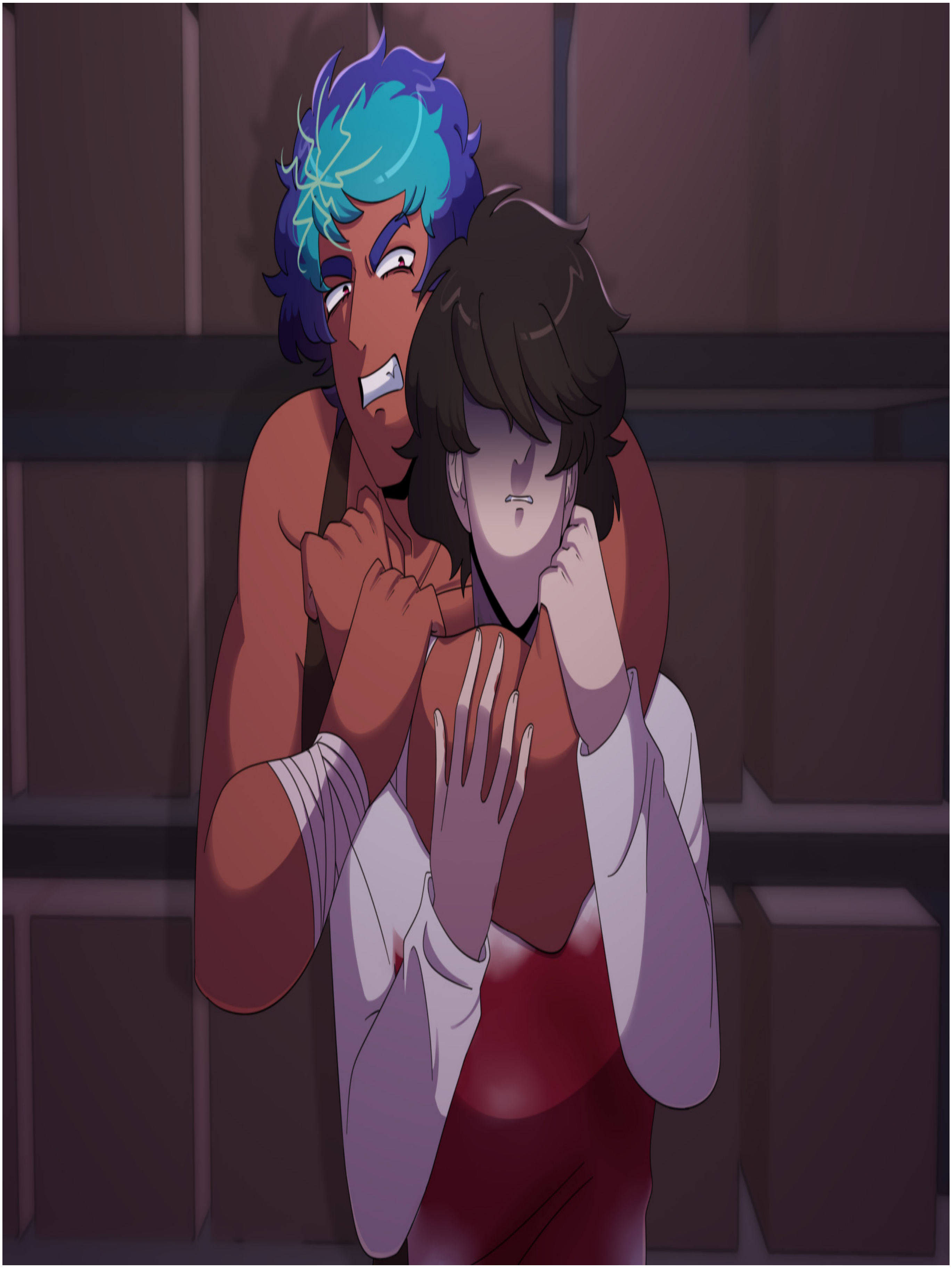
Saiki: "..."

Kurumada: “Still, he sure had the energy to speak despite his airway being blocked. What he said to me, though, was a damn shock at the time.”

Hayasaka: “Huh…? W-What did he say?”

Kurumada: “...”

FLASHBACK



L: “K-Kurumada…! So you… are… *ack* … the… traitor…”

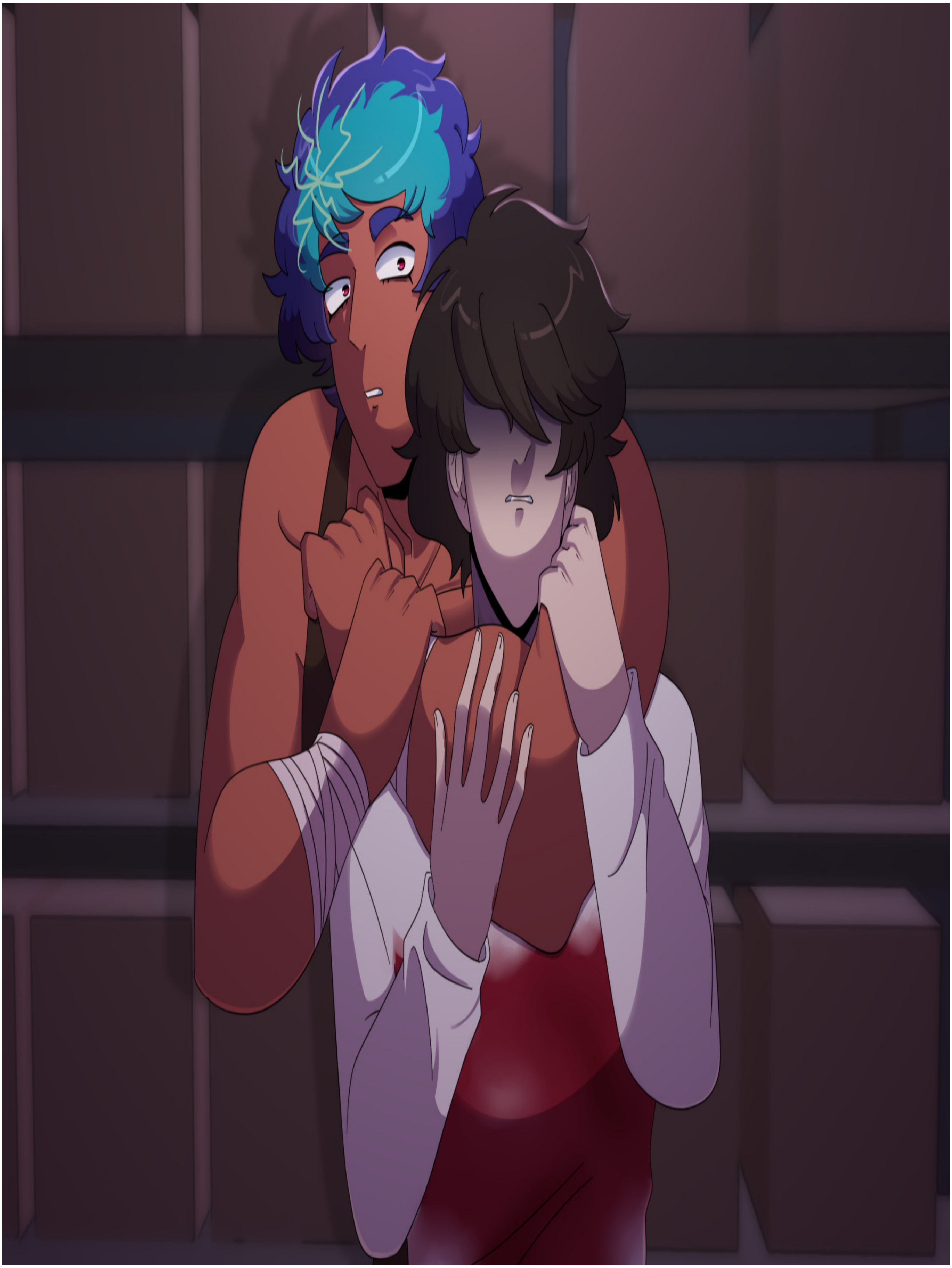
Kurumada: “Stop strugglin’. Let me make this quick. Just–”

L: “Ah… then… you… *ack* … must not… k-know…”

Kurumada: “Know what…?”

L: “The… the bombs… *they’re fa…ke*… ”

Kurumada: “Wh…at…?”



FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: "... *Fake* ?"

Natsuki: "What the hell?! The bombs weren't even real this whole freaking time?!"

Kurumada: "I couldn't believe it myself. My grip on him had even loosened a little at the news."

Latte: "Ah, wouldn't that mean the reason why Monotora and Nesos showed no interest in the bombs this morning was because they had found out they were fake from hearing that?"

Saiki: " *But that also means… L had lied to everyone about the bombs* ."

Brian: "L… He never put any of us in danger in the first place."

Jesse: "Shit, yo… This whole situation? Completely fucked up. Got us all worked up for jack, that jerkass."

Kurumada: "Either way, he was on his last legs when he let that out. There was nothin' else that could be done, and I soon felt him go limp. It wasn't like I had the time to think about what he said as I still had the rest of the case to carry out. So, I continued on to prepare the interrogation set up."

Jesse: "What about the sledgehammer? Is it like we said, how you were given it in the vents, and covered it up in blood from a blood bag or something?"

Kurumada: "Uh, yeah…"

Latte: "So if you were working in the dark, when did you manage to see Hayasaka?"

Kurumada: “As I walked around, my eyes adjusted to the dark, and I came across what looked to be someone lying on the floor. I couldn’t make out who until I knelt down beside ‘em, but when I realised who I was looking at, I almost thought I was losing it. I had no clue why Hayasaka was there – and I sure as hell had no fuckin’ idea why he was unconscious – but, I knew I wasn’t gonna leave him there. It was gonna be hard, but I decided to take him with me.”

Hayasaka: “It–It wasn’t an order by Nesos…?”

Kurumada: “It was the only thing I did in the case of my own free choice. I wanted to take ya back to your hotel room at first, but when I snuck you over there, I saw Jesse, Natsuki and Saiki were inside the lobby. I didn’t want to be caught with you like that, so I quickly switched directions. I didn’t know where to go, so I just ended up taking you to the beach instead. I tried placing you in an inconspicuous place, uh, somewhere I hoped the others wouldn’t think to look. To be honest, I… I wanted to stay with you for the rest of the night. I didn’t know if something bad had happened to ya. But, I had to go back to the second island to blend back into the bomb search. Heh, I really think the world was punishing me each time by placing you where I was meant to do my dirty work.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Kurumada: “...This murder, it ain’t like the others before. Even though L pissed me off at times, I never had any vendetta against him. I was strictly following orders.”

Brian: “You could have refused.”

Kurumada: “Yeah, I could have. But, I didn’t.”

Saiki: “ *What would have happened if you got away with it* ?”

Kurumada: “What’s meant to happen if a killer wins. The only difference would be that Hayasaka wouldn’t have to face any punishments. We… would’ve been the only ones standing.”

Natsuki: “Huh? Then, I don’t understand why you even exposed yourself. You would've gotten what you wanted, right?”

Jesse: “Maybe you were worried Nesos were gonna flake on their deal again if you kept quiet?”

Kurumada: “...I don’t know. But I just… feel this way is better now. Despite everything, I know Hayasaka is still safe.”

Kurumada then went to pull Hayasaka close. To his surprise, he weakly shifted his body away.

Hayasaka: “Y-Yet, this didn’t do the same for you in the slightest.”

Kurumada: “...Haya–”

???: “ *Tkk—whrr—beep–* ”

Before the other had the chance to react, a strange assortment of mechanical noises began to ring out from past the group’s conversation. Looking over, they paused in bewilderment as the forgotten tiger picked themselves up from the ground. Their body juddered as they plodded towards the group. In instinct, Hayasaka could feel himself slip back towards Kurumada in the uncertainty of what the hell the tiger was going to do now that they were awake. Had they been listening in to what Kurumada had been saying this whole time?

To their shock, however, Monotora just walked past. And kept walking until they took a seat right underneath their throne. Lulling their head to the side, Hayasaka paused as their golden eye locked onto them.

Monotora: “...Oh, does it even matter in the end? You’re getting worked up over nothing over here.”

Brian: “What’re you talking about…?”

Monotora: “C’mon, would Nesos really punish our traitor?”

When it hit him, all previous panic had left Hayasaka's mind. Monotora's lack of response to all of it should've made him realise it sooner. Somehow, it brought a smile to his dry lips.

Hayasaka: "Ah…? T-That is… Of course… I should've realised such a thing… You wouldn't, of course not… Ah… Hahaha…"

Monotora: "...Hey, ya wanna know something else?"

Hayasaka: "What…?"

Monotora: "I was fuckin' joking, you gullible idiot!! Ahahahaha! The fuck would we want with such a useless, defying, and untrustworthy traitor like him anymore?! With all that shit he spilled, that's just the icing on the cake! He ain't fit for *our* workforce, that's for sure."

Monotora sprung up, narrowing their eyes sadistically. It was all an act. Monotora was completely fine – they weren't designed to break just from some glass. Sure, they might've been out of it for a moment, but that wouldn't stop such a technologically brilliant murder machine. And they revelled in squeezing out every nasty joke they could to tease those who were blind to these truths.

Monotora: "I was s'posed to announce this ages ago, if that fuck-up didn't occur. Still, better late than never, so consider yourself lucky. We regret, with no regrets, to inform you that Kurumada has been promptly fired from Nesos, and his punishment will occur shortly."

Punishment.

Punishment…

Punishment ?

Something about how that word was uttered seemed to finally shatter any argument of hope Hayasaka had in the back of his mind. It made his heart beat so hard he could feel it in his throat. Trying to push its way out of his mouth. Trying to escape his rapid breaths. Trying to stop his shaking body.

No, this part wasn't supposed to happen. Not this soon. Not at all. He could endure the call outs. He could endure the vote. He could endure the explanation. He could endure every *fucking* thing that wasn't this.

No, the one thing that would *not* happen.

Hayasaka: "N-No… T-T-This won't happen… I-It won't happen…"

Monotora: "Hmmm, I think it will~"

Hayasaka: "It won't… I-It just won't…"

Monotora: "I have a damn good urge to turn up the pain factor on this one ten-fold for that little stunt our traitor pulled on me, not to mention on top of all the previous muck-ups he's caused Nesos."

Hayasaka: "S-Shut up…"

Monotora: "What was that? You wanted the front row seat? Wow, I didn't think you'd be so eager to watch–"

Hayasaka: " *I SAID SHUT UP* !"

He didn't even know how, but Hayasaka found himself charging straight for the tiger, L's portrait stand gripped tightly in his fists and raised high ready to be swung.

Hayasaka: " *I'm going to kill you* !!"

Monotora: "Eh…?!"

Brian: “H-Hayasaka…!!”

He was going to kill them he was going to kill them he was going to kill them he was–

Kurumada: “Aargh…!”

A pair of arms locked around his waist, pulling him into a halt. Back crashing against the large chest behind him, Hayasaka felt the air in his lungs fly out, making him choke so hard that his fingers had lost all grip and he heard the portrait stand thud onto the ground with a loud echo. It was pathetic how he hardly got far at all.

But like hell was he done. Hayasaka attempted to struggle out of Kurumada’s grip. He was writhing and twisting like a madman, but it didn’t work. He was kicking his heels against Kurumada’s shins, but it didn’t work. He was even throwing his head back against the other’s chin, but it didn’t work. Kurumada was so much stronger than he could ever dream to be, and his grip didn’t budge no matter how rough he tried. And it pissed him off so badly.

Hayasaka: “No…! Kurumada! Let me go! Let me *go* …!”

Kurumada: “I ain’t budging, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “You brute!! You berserker!!”

Kurumada: “Say whatever you want. I’m not letting you take another step.”

Hayasaka: “I need to–I need to stop them! I need to stop them from killing you! It’s the only way! It’s the only thing left I can do!”

Kurumada: “You know you can’t, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “I can! I-I will! Why are you acting like this?! Do you even care you’re going to die?!”

Kurumada: “Hayasaka–”

Hayasaka: “Do you even care that I know you’re going to die?!”

Kurumada: “More than anything! But I ain’t gonna let you get yourself in danger over this!”

Hayasaka: “I don’t care! I don't want anyone to die anymore! And I don’t want you to die!”

Kurumada: “You’re strong, Hayasaka. You ain’t gonna let it get to ya. And you–”

Hayasaka: “I’m not strong! I can’t do this if you’re not here! I can’t do *anything* without you!”

Kurumada: “Yes you can, damnit! You’ve done all this without me, haven’t ya? You’ve done all this despite what happened to Mai, haven’t ya?”

Hayasaka: “No! You don’t understand…! I can’t let this happen!”

Kurumada: “I know you can. *You* know you can! Why are you actin’ like you can’t–”

Hayasaka: “ *Because I love you, you idiot* !!”

Finally. There it finally was.

Everything became so quiet once the words were cried out. It was so strange. He continued to tremble, yet his energy had been forgotten. All the adrenaline had been drained. Hayasaka stopped struggling. His shoulders slumped, body falling much easier back into the other. He felt as the other’s grip loosened on him.

Hayasaka: “And what am I meant to do if the one I love is gone…? What can I do…? I can’t do anything at all…”

Latte: “H-Hayasaka…”

Kurumada: “...Ah… Ah… *Bwaahahaha* !!”

Hayasaka: “ *Huh* …?”

Kurumada’s boisterous laugh rang against his ears. And just like that, his grip on him had been sealed once again. This time, however, it wasn’t out of a need to stop him. No, he could feel it was out of endearment, out of joy, out of *love* .

Kurumada: “Shit, you said it! You really said it…! You *do* love me! Hahaha…!”

Hayasaka: “H-Huh…?”

Kurumada: “And here I thought I was gonna be the first to say the L-word. Well, s’not like it’s a big thing or anything, but still…! Damn, feels so good too!”

Hayasaka: “What’re you saying…?”

Kurumada: “I’m sayin’... I’m sayin’ I’m a damn lucky man! I love ya, too! I love ya so damn much! I was kinda worried back then when you wouldn’t say it, but now I have nothin’ to worry about! I feel great!”

Hayasaka: “How… How could you even feel great…? You killed someone. You’re going to *die* .”

Kurumada: “I…I dunno. I guess knowing how ya truly feel has given me a sense of relief. A sense of, uh, closure. I just wanna know, what was holdin’ you back?”

Hayasaka: “I… I was so scared saying it before. Someone like me… I don’t get to say these things. I’m not supposed to say these things. I didn’t know how to say it at all.”

Kurumada: “Fuck that! You deserve to say whatever the hell you want, feel whatever the hell you want! I’ve seen what you’re capable of when you’re the most honest with yourself. Don’t you feel just a little bit better saying it out loud?”

Hayasaka: “I… I don’t know. I just… don’t want you to go…”

Kurumada: “Ah… Right…”

With a furrowed brow, Kurumada scanned around the room. Then, his eyes lit up in realisation of what he had found. Carefully, he moved his hands clasped around Hayasaka’s waist onto his shoulders, turning him around to the others behind. Brian, Saiki, Latte, Natsuki, Jesse: he had completely neglected them in his haze. They were all watching the two, and he was unable to not meet their gaze.

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. How about them? Don’t ya love them too?”

Hayasaka: “I… O-Of course I do.”

Kurumada: “Then you have nothin’ to worry about.”

Hayasaka: “W-What do you–”

Kurumada: “You made some great friends here, unlike me. With them, you have all you need to finish off Nesos.”

Hayasaka: “All I need…?”

Kurumada: “I’ve exposed a lot about Nesos right here, a lot more than I’m sure they would’ve liked. You’re a damn smart guy; I know you got it in you if you got them to help ya.”

Kurumada gave a soft look out towards the group, as if he were asking for one last favour out of them in spite of all. It was Saiki who nodded first. Then came Latte, and Natsuki, and Jesse. Hayasaka felt a strange warmth, but it wasn’t enough. Kurumada looked at Brian. Brian didn’t look back.

Kurumada: “Brian… You can hate me all ya want. That’s fine. I’m not expectin’ an ounce of forgiveness for what I did to you, to L, and for deceiving you all for so long. But, this isn’t about me. This is about Hayasaka. Don’t take any of what I did out on him. He’s had nothing to do with my choices.”

Brian: “...”

Brian’s eyebrows creased, biting his lip. He glanced towards the two.

Brian: "...I–"

Monotora: " *Alright* ! I'm fucking bored now! I honestly thought things were gonna take a fun turn once Dr. Dangerous started swinging that portrait around, but you just made things so soppy, you manwhore. So, I'm gonna execute you now, capiche?"

Hayasaka: "No…! N-No…!"

Monotora: "Yes! *Yes* ! Kurumada's good as dead anyway, didn't ya know?"

Saiki: " *What do you mean good as dead* ?"

Monotora: "Kurumada left out one crucial detail about that bite he got from me. Y'see, my teeth are laced with venom. It's meant to kill anyone that comes into contact with it. 'Course, he's only really lived this long 'cuz of how bulky he is to withstand it. I'm sure a few more bites and he'd be six feet under – gahahahaha!"

Hayasaka: "Ah… Ah… N…o…"

But as Hayasaka went to grab Kurumada's arm again, he realised he wasn't there. He realised his hands were no longer on his shoulders. Twisting his body around, he saw the other was now a few steps away from him.

Kurumada: "I'm sorry, Hayasaka. I'm such a terrible bastard, ain't I? Even now, I just can't be truthful with you."

Hayasaka: "K-Kurumada… I don't care… I-I don't care if you keep everything from me, as long as you don't… go… *sob* …"

Kurumada: "I don't… want to leave you, either. I gotta do this, though. I let Mai down, and I let you down. In the end, I couldn't protect either of you. And yet, 'til the point I can't no more, everything in my body is telling me I need to keep protecting you. Otherwise, *I ‘prolly wouldn’t be able to let ya go* .”

Kurumada wiped away something wet from his eye. Hayasaka felt the tastes in his mouth rot. The world was so disgusting.

Monotora: “Aw, come now! This is gonna be a good one. I personally had a paw in plannin’ his execution, and I’m excited to finally see it through.”

Kurumada: “Eh…? Heheh, now I’m kinda interested in what you had in mind. After all, I don’t go down without a fight.”

Hayasaka: “Huh…?”

Monotora: “I wonder if those words’ll mean anythin’ real soon. Well then, we’ve prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Boxer, Kurumada!”

Hayasaka: “Wait! No! Longer! J-Just a little longer! Please! Hold out a little longer! *Please* !”

Monotora: “It’s time to play with my prey!”

Hayasaka: “ *Stop* …!”

Kurumada: “Hey–!”

He couldn’t do it, not for a second more. He had dived into the other’s chest. If held on hard enough, tight enough, they wouldn’t be able to take him. Maybe they’d take him with him. It’s not like he cared anymore.

Hayasaka: “ *Naomichi* …!”

A coarse chuckle rang just above his ears. He felt his bangs be brushed aside by a soft hand. A pair of slightly chapped lips pressed against his forehead.

Monotora: “IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!!”

Kurumada: “Hey, Shunsuke. Just watch me, okay? *I’m gonna die a happy man* .”

PUNISHMENT TIME!! [VIDEO]

…

Gone…

…

Gone…

…

He was gone…

…

The floor was so far away. It stretched so far away yet it was right below him. Against his sore knees. Against his trembling hands. Against his churning stomach.

…

So, this is what it felt like, right?

…

To feel truly nothing.

…

…

…

Brian's eyes were locked on Hayasaka. His head was hung so low, it was hard to see his face. Slowly, he knelt down, bending his back lower and lower until he could see the other's eyes. But there was nothing in them.

Brian: "...Haya–"

Hayasaka: " *Cough cough hack* –!!"

Brian: "H-Haah…!"

Brian flinched back. But it happened so quickly. Hayasaka's hands had dived for his mouth, coughing and hacking and his body was jittering and something sickly and wet had spewed out between his fingers and onto the floor. It wasn't vomit. Brian didn't know what the hell it was. No one had the chance to eat today, right? Was it the pressure of his stomach finally exploding out after what Kurumada did to him? It stained the other's palms, it dribbled down his quivering chin. He was panting after such a nasty experience. It was probably terrible on his lungs. Probably even worse on his gut.

Brian wanted to reach a hand out. Maybe he could wipe away the spit on his chin. It wouldn't be much. But it would be a start.

So, he moved closer to–

Hayasaka: “ *AaaaAAAAAAAAaaaAAAHHH…!* ”

BANG

Hayasaka hit his head against the floor.

BANG

Brian was stunned to move. What was he–

BANG

Then he realised.

Everyone realised.

Natsuki: “Oh my god!!”

Jesse: “Shit…! Hey! Hey!!”

Latte: “Hayasaka! *Stop* !!”

Brian heard the squeak of his own loafers as his body scrambled frantically behind Hayasaka. He grabbed his waist unexpectedly violently, pulling him back up from the ground. He wasn’t going to let the other hurt himself.

Brian: “Nnn…!”

He grunted as he fought against the other’s hopeless desperation. Hayasaka was weak, but he was vigorous. And, when Brian thought he was winning, the other just changed tactics. Hands in his own hair, pulling and yanking as if he was going to rip his own scalp off and keep going until he could dig his nails deep into his skull, into his brain, tearing it into pieces.

Brian faltered. But what could he do? He couldn’t let go of his waist. Why the hell was Hayasaka acting this way?

And just like that he was pushed away. Shoved to the ground, he let out a yelp. He peered up to see Saiki had been even more ruthless than him. His darkened eyes only gave him a moment of attention before he dived to restrain Hayasaka’s hands behind his back. Brian was dazed. Was he using his powers, his inhuman strength, to keep them so tightly sealed? Was Brian just no match for Saiki for this?

Hayasaka: “ *Nononononono… lethisendlethisend… there’snothingleftgodpleasesendmetohell* …”

Whatever Hayasaka blubbered out between sobs was so incoherent and unsightly that Brian could only stare in confusion. Saiki continued to keep his grip on his hands. No one else could speak. Not a single thing. Positive? Negative? As if anything would go through to the man trapped in a world of numbing agony.

Hayasaka: “ *So… use…less…* ”

As Hayasaka’s head lulled to the side, not another word was spoken. His eyes were closed, and his breathing was soft.

Brian: “D-Did… he pass out…?”

Latte: “Oh god…!”

Latte jumped down to his side. Saiki let go of his hands, but the unresponsive man remained still.

Latte: “No! Everything he was doing – I-I don’t know why he was doing it, but it was just too much for him! He needs help! He needs to go back and rest immediately!”

At that, both Latte and Saiki began to pick Hayasaka up. Brian, bewildered, forced himself to his feet as well. He wanted to move forward too. He wanted to say something too. But his body didn’t respond.

Latte: “C-Come on! Brian, help us…!”

Brian: “B…But–”

Saiki: “ *Then just don’t* .”

Brian froze. It wasn’t his fault. It was his body. He wanted to help.

Did he want to help?

Unsure, he looked over towards Natsuki and Jesse. Natsuki was shaking too, but Jesse wrapped an arm around her shoulder. Noticing Brian’s gaze, they stared back, coldly. Them too?

Brian had no one on his side. He could only fix his eyes on the floor. He heard everyone begin to leave. He could only find solace in the ground.

He clenched his fists. His eyes grew damp.

What a joke, what he had said before, about them.

...Nothing will stop us from being friends, right?

***

???#1: “... *Holy shit* .”

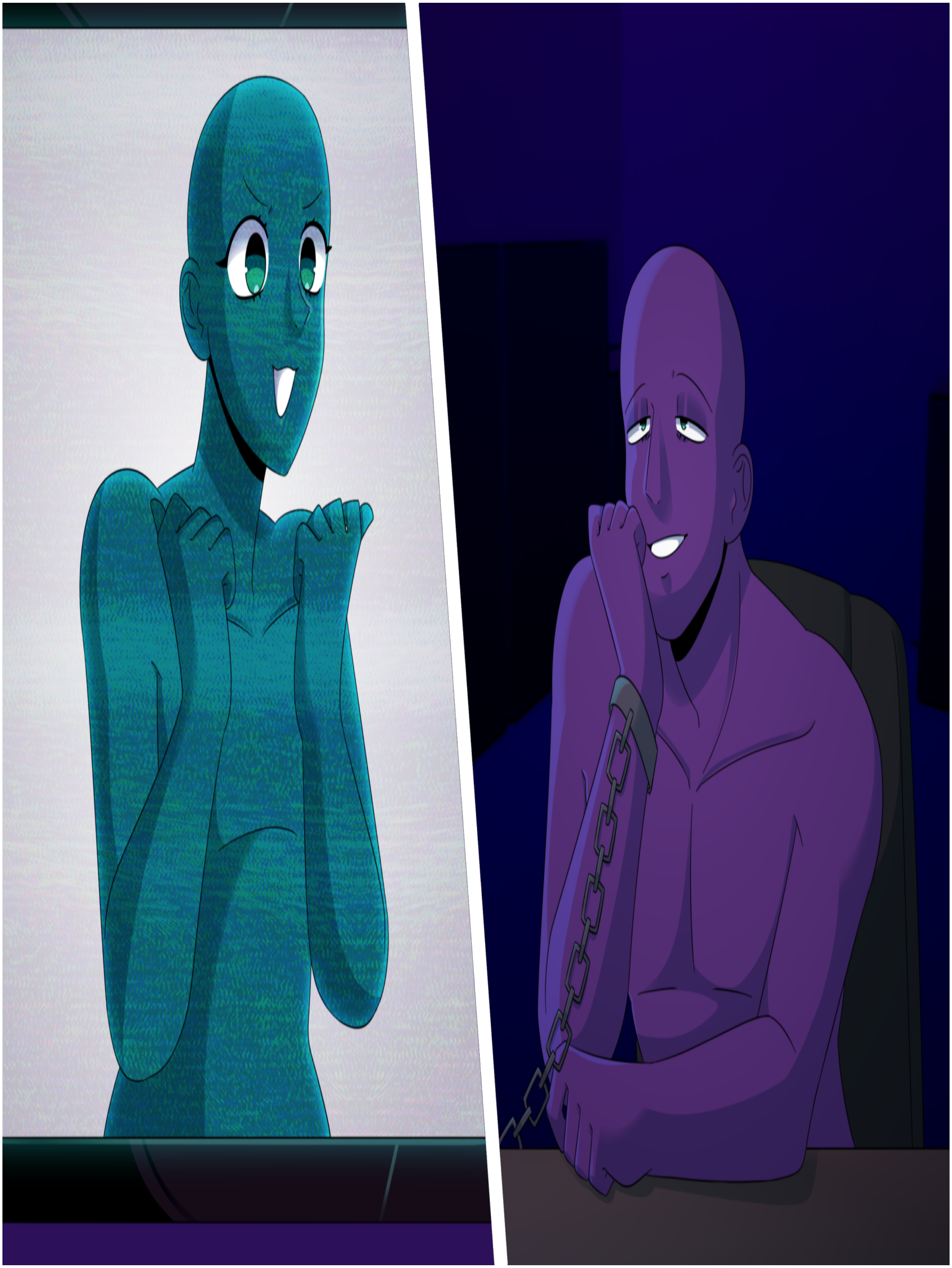
???#2: “ *Sniff… Wahh* …”

???#1: “Whoa, hey, you okay?”

???#2: “Mm… Yeah. Tragic romances always make me cry.”

???#1: “...Ah. Can’t blame you there. Almost felt myself tearing up. ‘Course, we can’t let that distract us.”

???#2: “Mhm…! If anything, this should help us fight for them more and more!”



???#1: “You change mood pretty quick. Maybe they even programmed some hormones into you.”

???#2: “Hey…! That’s not true~!”

???#1: “Hahaha, don’t worry. I was just teasing you. If anything, our desensitisation is pretty helpful.”

???#2: “That just sounds depressing.”

???#1: “Hm… Yeah. Guess so.”

???#2: “Then let’s not be depressed! C’mon, we’re just getting started, aren’t we?”

???#1: “Just getting…? *Ah* . You’ve cracked it, haven’t you?”

???#2: “Hehehe… We can put our plan into action real soon.”

???#1: “Might give it a day or two, for obvious reasons. But… Man, you really work miracles.”

???#2: “It’s not all on me! I wouldn’t have been able to do it without you!!”

???#1: “Oh yeah? Hey, I’m flattered. We make a team, that’s for sure.”

???#2: “The best team ever! We’re gonna help them, finally! I’m so excited~!”

???#1: “Let’s not bring out the celebration yet. We have… a lot to do. Can you handle that?”

???#2: “If I couldn’t… I wouldn’t be the way I am now. I wouldn’t have realised that I’m capable of something greater than what I thought I could in the past. But, I’m this me now. And this is the me I want to be.”

CHAPTER 5

The Fault in Our Scars

06

Chapter End Notes

"When the beat drops, I'm going to fucking kill myself" - Hayasaka, definitely (/cruelty squad ref)

Girl help me girl the tragic yaoi got me fucked up in the club, can't have shit on Nesos Island I'm fucking bawling (funfact while I formatted this chapter I had my Brian plush beside my laptop. No I don't think he enjoyed this chapter either)

How does it feel.... boyfriend traitor.... trader joes.... haha gottem.... I'm.... I'm gonna lie down now-

Also I think it's time to actually erm clarify something I didn't before... those two 'lil freakers making their 2nd appearance at the end? Neither of them are the mastermind or traitor. They're in fact different people. What's their deal then? Idk go ask them or something /j

And you know that 3D storage room background used in some of the CGs and the closing argument comic? I made that myself in blender B-} (sometimes an artist hates backgrounds... so instead they model it!)

Again, tyvm for reading! Have a wonderful day or night, wherever you are!

Chapter 6: The Crash of Nesos: Your Termination (Daily Life)

Chapter by lennardd

Chapter Notes

> would you still love me even if it's been three years and the story's not finished yet
>
> A lot of time (again) has passed since the posting of the last chapter (again). Do you see a pattern emerging here (again). Still, it's good to be back, and especially on the final chapter of this giant freak of a fanfiction on the ao3 (it's fr a freak just lmk). We're super grateful for all the continued patience and support on this story, no matter how long it takes.
>
> And... wait what is this? A daily life? For chapter 6? All I can say to you is: this won't be like the other ones you've seen for the previous chapters. So, relax yourself, okay?
>
> For 24.7k words, let's see what utter hopelessness can change into--if anything at all...?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Good afternoon."

"...Oh, haha. Don't mind me. It just turned noon, see?"

…

"So, I had a look over your resume. If I had to describe it in one word? It's decent."

"Decent education, decent work experience, decent skill set. You're… Well, I'm not going to repeat myself."

"You're better than the underqualified, but you're not a head turner. But hey, not a lot of people are. If everyone was, then we'd have no one at the bottom to do the dirty work. Haha."

"I mean, an office worker. It doesn't sound that appealing—especially compared to these other folks I've seen. But, you've made it work for yourself. To say I respect it wouldn't be the right word. Because I don't think you pull much respect from it, anyway."

“I have no reason not to hire you. Still, I just have one question.”

“Why did you let them die?”

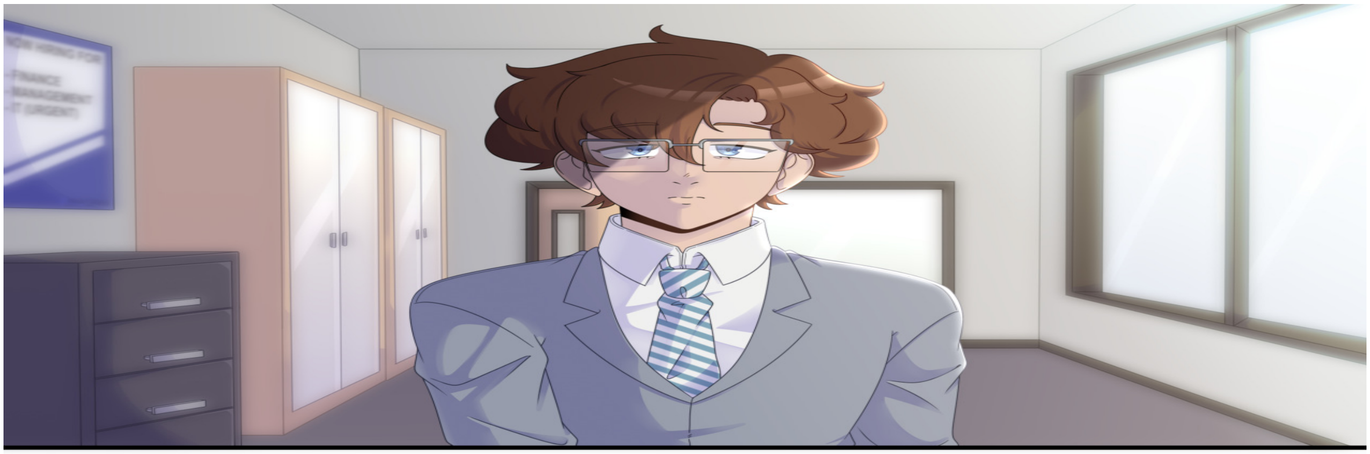
“1 month. 10 gone. Their goals, hobbies, opinions, beliefs—all gone.”

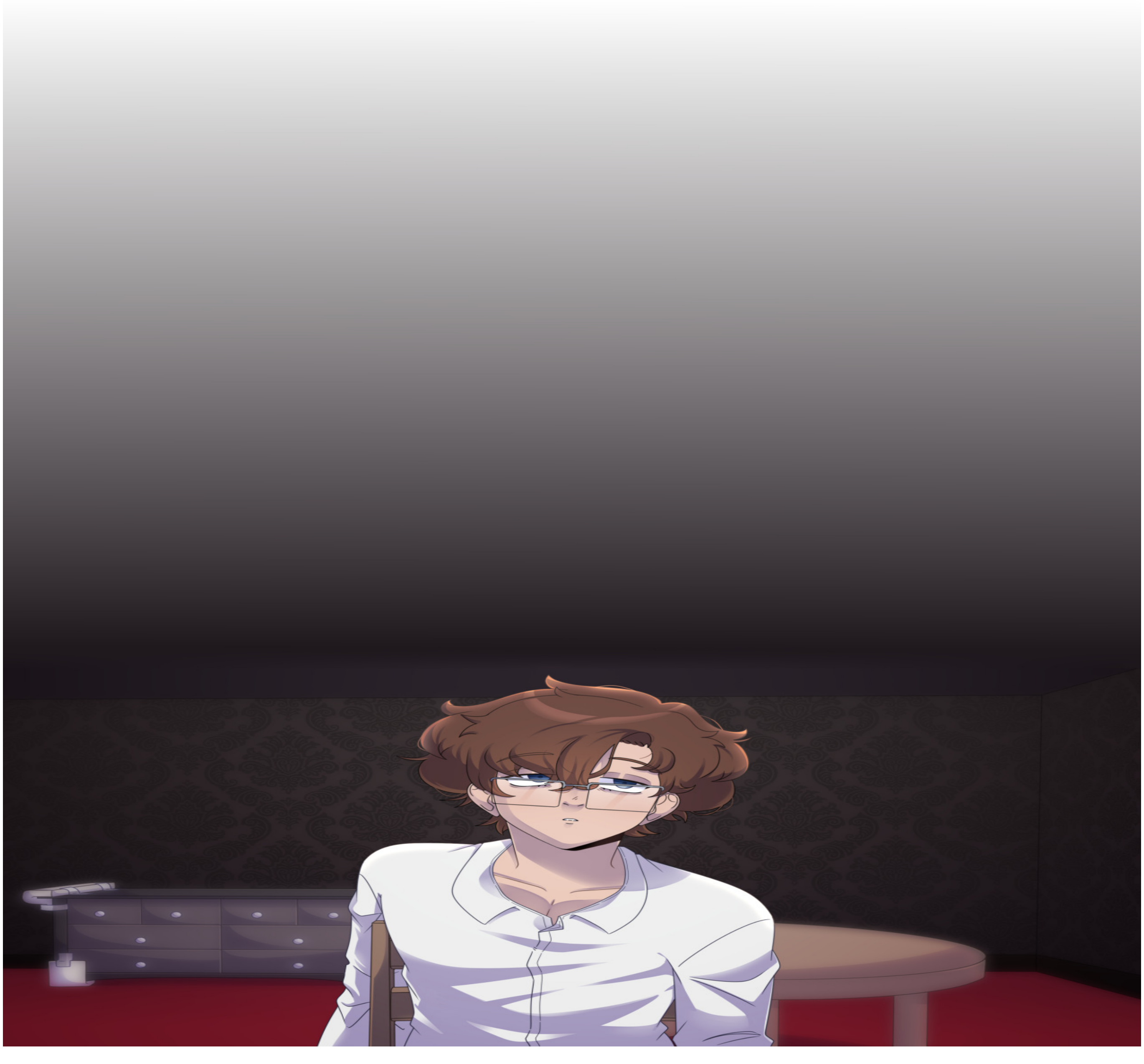
“You held that axe as the executioner. You even spared no pity towards the ones you loved. Hey, I guess no one’s above the law in your eyes, huh?”

“Of course, you never had any control. It wasn’t a place of power for you. No, it was the coward’s choice. And now look at where it’s gotten you. Right back in the exact same place as before.”

“I would ask who’s next, but I’ve heard you’ve already figured that out.”

“We look forward to working with you again, Hayasaka.”


NOW HIRING FOR
-FINANCE
-MANAGEMENT
-IT (URGENT)



Breathing in.

Breathing out.

Breathing in again.

Then breathing out again.

All Hayasaka could focus on was his breathing. There wasn't much else of interest to do. The air was as stuffy as it was the last time he was awake, but it wasn't like he was going to stand up and open a window. Something like that would just be bothersome.

Leaning back in his chair, he swung his heel against one of its legs. He listened to each faint thump that passed in the empty room—over and over again. How many days had it been since the trial again? Hayasaka shrugged at the rhetoric. It didn't matter. The body will rot all the same.

He wasn't startled when a knock came from the door, either. He simply dragged his eyes up to the clock on the wall.

Hayasaka: "...Five minutes late."

Heaving himself up from the chair, Hayasaka stretched out his back with a groan. He dragged his feet towards the door, pulling it open just enough so that only his voice could get through to the outside.

???: "Good afternoon, Hayasaka. How're you feeling?"

Hayasaka: "I'm fine. Can you not fit it through, Latte?"

Latte: "No, no, it's… fine."

Following a few clinks, a tray was slid into the room beside his feet.

Latte: “You know, Saiki was going to accompany me this time. But, he got caught up in a thing again, and…”

Hayasaka: “I don’t think he ever will.”

Latte: “Well…”

Hayasaka: “He has nothing to worry about, anyway. There’s not much I can do with a plastic knife.”

Latte: “I for one think it’s practical. After all, there’s a lot less washing up to do.”

Hayasaka: “Quite the blessing, that…”

Latte: “...Hey, so, I saw Jesse and Natsuki head to the beach again today. I was thinking… Why don’t you go down there? You can go get some nice fresh air, a dip in the water…”

Hayasaka closed his eyes, taking a deep breath.

Hayasaka: “I appreciate your suggestion, Latte. But… not today.”

Latte: “No? That’s a shame. It’s a nice day out.”

Hayasaka: “...Thank you for the food.”

Latte: “Maybe tomorrow then?”

Hayasaka closed the door.

Latte: “I’ll come back with dinner at seven if you’re still awake.”

Latte’s voice muffled through the wood. Picking up the tray, Hayasaka brought it over to the table. And placed it beside breakfast.

Hayasaka: “Somehow, these meals look much blander than yesterday’s. And she’s switched from lattes to plain coffees…”

Just like breakfast, lunch had been served on a paper plate, accompanied by a set of plastic utensils. It reminded him of his old work’s cafeteria. It also reminded him of a prison.

Hayasaka’s hand subconsciously slid over his wilting stomach.

Hayasaka: “Maybe one day someone will instead just come in here and spit on me. The effect will practically be the same.”

Sitting back down in the chair, Hayasaka weakly leaned down for his tablet. When he booted it up, the screen was already on exactly what he wanted, because he didn’t care for much else.

[10:05PM] Hayasaka: this isn’t fair

[10:06PM] Hayasaka: why did it have to be you

[10:06PM] Hayasaka: you’re an idiot a big idiot

[10:08PM] Hayasaka: I hate you you’re horrible

[10:15 PM] Hayasaka: I hate you so much

[3:17AM] Hayasaka: I'm sorry

[3:18AM] Hayasaka: I didn't mean to say that

[3:19AM] Hayasaka: I love you

[3:19AM] Hayasaka: god isn't that so easy to say now that you're dead

[3:21AM] Hayasaka: because it's my fault isn't it

[4:25AM] Hayasaka: I don't want to deal with this anymore

Hayasaka's eyes all but glazed over the previous messages like it was print in the news. He narrowed his eyes to make sense of the keyboard, tapping at the screen.

[12:24PM] Hayasaka: It's boring to wait. I wish I could watch you practise in the gym

He dropped the tablet somewhere on the floor. A strained rumble emitted from his stomach. He grimaced.

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: "Speaking of which, Hayasaka, you were… very light to carry. It's not a means of skipping meals anymore. I need you to eat more in the future."

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...It’s fine. You can’t eat now, so why should I? My tongue feels numb regardless. I don’t even know if there’s blood still in my mouth.”

Another grumble sounded from his stomach.

Hayasaka: “At least I don’t cry anymore. I wonder if it’s because my body physically gave up. I wouldn’t blame it. Maybe that’s a good thing. Tears are burdensome.”

His stomach kicked at him again, this time sending his nerves into hysterics.

Hayasaka: “Urk… It hasn’t been that long. I’ve survived much longer without this bugging me so soon. If I can just hold out a bit more… I’m sure the pain will subside.”

Folding into himself, Hayasaka held onto his stomach loosely as he closed his eyes. Once more, he focused on his breathing.

Breathing in. Then breathing out. No more thinking; he’d just let the world slip away.

…

…

…

???: “Even if we’re all told we can just live on the island without having to kill someone, we’re all being forced to murder one way or another from the motives presented to us so far.”

…

???: “No, it’s just a lie, plain and simple. A lie to lead us into a false sense of security, one where we believe we have free control over our actions. Their goal is to make everyone suffer.”

…

???: “Therefore, a cycle sprouts: people die, the rest of us become more traumatised and depressed, repeating until we lose all motivation to escape and the game ends in nothing but bloodshed.”

…

???: “Did it ever feel good?”

Yuri: “Have you learned your lesson yet?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Yuri: “You’ve always been the smartest, Hayasaka. More than the detective. More than the baker. More than the boxer. Because you’re the only one who listened to me.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Yuri: “So, don’t let this go on any longer. Don’t push this feeling away.”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Yuri: “You’re doing the right thing.”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Yuri: “After all, what do you have left?”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Hayasaka: “ *Argh* …!!”

Hayasaka shot his head up, panting softly. He quivered, swallowing despite his dry throat.

Hayasaka: “A… A dream, was that? How… bothersome.”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Hayasaka: “...No, not all of it was a dream, unfortunately. Is it seven already?”

Glancing at the clock, he faltered.

It was almost ten at night.

Hayasaka sat there, brows furrowed. Who was this? But even as he waited, wondering if it was all in his head, the knocking seemed to continue on. Five or so minutes had passed before he grit his teeth at the hypnotising rhythm of the persistent noise.

Hayasaka: “If they need me so badly, then why haven’t they just opened the door? They all know it’s not locked for goodness sake…”

Begrudgingly, Hayasaka trudged over to the door. He was about to reach for the handle when he heard a voice speak up from the other side.

???: “I get it. I-I mean, I really get it. You don’t want to see anyone right now. You probably don’t want to see me at all… or, uh, ever again.”

Hayasaka’s hand dropped down to his side.

FLASHBACK

Brian: “...Hayasaka. I’m sorry. I know this was something you didn’t want to hear. I know you didn’t want to think it was a possibility, so you became quiet because the only choice was something you deni—”

Hayasaka: “ *Shut up* !”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka grit his teeth.

???: “But… And I’m sorry if this sounds dumb, but I want to apologise. You are awake, right? So—look, you don’t have to speak to me. I just want a sign that you’re there. I won’t be long. Please, Hayasaka…”

There was a quiet sniffle.

???: “I-I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I don’t know what else to do. No one is talking to me. I hate this so much. It’s so stupid, isn’t it? You’re the last person I have—and you’re the one who hates me the most.”

Hayasaka couldn’t take it anymore.

The door swung open.

Staring back with those large, brown eyes was his spitting image. *Brian* .

Needless to say, he was caught off guard at how soon the door opened on him. Or perhaps he was startled it had opened at all. That’s why his mouth was so ajar, Hayasaka figured, as if whatever he planned to mumble next had been ripped from his mind.

But then, Brian’s eyes only grew wider, eyebrows knitting together as he peered him up and down. And that’s when Hayasaka realised this was the first time he ever fully opened the door on someone.

It just had to be this one.

Brian: “God… You look… terrible.”

Hayasaka: "...Thanks."

Brian: "W-Wait, no, I didn't—that's not what I meant to… *Ah, pull yourself together, idiot* …"

Hayasaka could only raise a brow as Brian knocked a closed fist against his forehead.

Brian: "Okay—let's start this again. Hayasaka, I—"

Hayasaka: "What did you mean 'no one is talking to you'?"

Brian was quick to choke on his words—he clearly hadn't expected Hayasaka to have been listening in to what he was saying before he opened the door, nor him blatantly cutting in on his filler. His eyes were more hesitant to meet Hayasaka now, glued towards the ground.

Brian: "...It's nothing. It's just—we're all doing our own thing now. That's all. I was just overexaggerating it."

Hayasaka didn't buy that idea for even a second, if Brian's clenched fists spoke of anything. But his thinning patience outweighed the incentive to pry.

Brian: "...A-Anyway, enough about me. I'm… glad to see you alright. Not alright, but… Here."

Hayasaka: "...Yeah."

Hayasaka went to close his door, but a pair of shaky hands dived to hold it open.

Brian: "W-Wait–! Um…"

Hayasaka: " *What* ?"

Momentarily taken aback by his harsh tone, Brian shook his head.

Brian: “I… I want to apologise. For everything I did. This wouldn’t have happened—you wouldn’t have ended up like this—if it wasn’t for me—”

Hayasaka: “I don’t care.”

Brian: “Huh…?”

Hayasaka: “I’m perfectly alright with the way things are.”

Brian: “But… W-What? What? Do you not care that—”

Hayasaka: “In fact, I’ve been feeling fine. Very fine, in fact. That was until you showed up at my door with your tail between your legs. You can say whatever you want, but I’m not going to pity you. If you want to be sorry, you can leave.”

Brian’s face was at a loss. Every word Hayasaka spoke dug deep and dragged out any ounce of hope from his eyes. He was certain now he had worn him down, tuned him out.

Brian: “...You don’t look very fine.”

Hayasaka faltered.

He tore the door further inwards, causing Brian’s grip to break off.

Hayasaka: “I said *leave* .”

Frozen, Brian could barely mutter an apology as he turned around. Hayasaka felt a tug in his chest—but shouldn't relief bring him the opposite?

He found himself watching Brian stumble off. No, *limping* —limping on his poor leg. His poor leg that had his body trembling every time his foot so much as hit the floor.

Hayasaka: " *Brian* ."

Brian whipped his head around in confusion. Yet, Hayasaka continued to talk despite his body's urge to shut the door.

Hayasaka: "Go rest for god's sake. Don't go walking around if your injury's still straining you."

Brian stood there, almost dumbfounded.

Brian: "...Haya—"

But Hayasaka had already slammed the door on him. The screaming in his mind had finally been put to rest now that he was out of sight. Dragging himself back to his chair, Hayasaka pushed the balls of his palms into his closed eyes.

Hayasaka: ("Why on earth did I do that…? Whatever. He won't come back now.")

Fatigued from the interaction, Hayasaka dozed off a little earlier than usual that night.

***

'You know what this feels like?

Russian roulette.

You might think that sounds ridiculous, but let me explain it. Trust me, I've had a lot of time to think.

We all started out inside bullet chambers in a revolver. Who was on my left? I don't know. Who was on my right? It doesn't matter.

And suddenly, bang. The person on my left is gone. I can't smell the sweet aroma of bread anymore.

It took me a while to finally slip my hands off my ringing ears. But then, bang. The person on my right is gone. I can't feel the warmth of strong arms anymore.

I'm the only one left in the revolver's chamber. What sort of luck is that?

You might think they're the unlucky ones for dying, but I know I've been given the worst luck out of all of us. Because I've been the one allowed to live up to this point.

A cycle that never ends. You have to load up bullets in order to shoot your target. When all the bullets are gone, there's nothing left to do.

A dummy bullet in the chamber has nothing left to live for.'

Hayasaka glazed his eyes over the words on the paper. His stomach churned.

Hayasaka: "To think I've gotten so bored I've resorted to writing. I wonder if you could consider this a poem…?"

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Peering over at the clock, Hayasaka could only groan.

Hayasaka: “Please… It can’t be him again.”

It was a shame he didn’t pray hard enough.

Brian: “Oh… I didn’t expect you to open so soon this time.”

Hayasaka spared his visitor so much as an irritated look. Yet somehow, Brian remained relaxed.

Brian: “Can I come in?”

Hayasaka: “...No.”

Brian: “Why not? I thought you could use some company.”

Hayasaka was baffled at how utterly different Brian was acting in comparison to last night, to the point where he was beginning to question if this was even the same person anymore.

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry—do you not remember what I told you last night?”

Brian: “I do. But, if you don’t care, then there shouldn’t be anything wrong with me coming inside, right?”

Hayasaka stared at the other. Then he glanced down the hall. It was just him and Brian—well, a really aggravating version of Brian that was attempting to throw his own words back at him. He just couldn’t figure out what the intent was.

Hayasaka: (“Is this guy an idiot?”)

Slowly, Hayasaka pulled the door inwards, stepping aside for the other to come in.

Hayasaka: ("...Am I?")

Brian walked inside, only for his calm demeanour to slip at the sight of the room.

Brian: "What… What happened in here?"

Hayasaka: "I can't hurt myself if there's nothing that can hurt me."

Hayasaka simply stated as he slipped past Brian and sat back on his chair.

Brian: "But… padding on the sides of your bed? Wardrobe? Is–Is the bathroom any better?"

Hayasaka: "Why don't you just look for yourself?"

Brian did so, only to return with a deeper concern on his face.

Brian: "What, so… Did they really not trust you on your own?"

Hayasaka: "Would you?"

Brian didn't respond. Hayasaka went to pick up his tablet.

Brian: "It looks like you're being pretty cooperative, though."

Hayasaka: "I've realised I don't have much to gain by bashing my head against things."

Brian: “...Hey, at least you’re not being watched.”

Hayasaka: “I don’t need to be watched to feel like I’m under constant surveillance.”

As Hayasaka tapped away on his tablet, Brian awkwardly shuffled his feet. He then spied the table, stepping towards it.

Brian: “There seems to be a lot of food on these plates…”

Hayasaka: “I’m not hungry right now.”

Brian: “...What’re you doing on there?”

Gesturing to his tablet, Brian leaned over to try and catch a look. Hayasaka drew the device close to his chest.

Hayasaka: “Have you finished your tour yet?”

Brian opened his mouth to reply, but bit his lip as he glanced elsewhere. That’s when he spotted something that switched his uncertainty back over to interest.

Brian: “Oh, were you writing something? That reminds me of when we all wrote that poem together. Mind if I have a look?”

He reached out to pick up the sheet. Hayasaka slammed his hand down on the paper, sparking a hostile air to bubble between the two.

Hayasaka: “What in god’s name has gone through your mind to make you act like this?”

Brian: “What’re you talking about…? Act what way?”

Hayasaka: “Thinking you can just waltz in here, and–and speak to me like we’re on some sort of equal footing.”

Brian: “You let me inside.”

Hayasaka: “And frankly I’m starting to wish I hadn’t.”

Brian: “But I thought you didn’t care, and you were fine with how things are.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “Hayasaka… I know I don’t have any place to say this, but… Are you sure? This doesn’t feel right.”

Hayasaka: “What the hell do you know about what’s right?”

Brian: “...Sorry. I think I’ve finished my tour now.”

As Brian began to make his way to the door, Hayasaka could only stare at him. Why was that tightness in his chest back again? The other’s words only confused his mind, but his body seemed to react strangely, like it knew something he didn’t. His stomach squeezed at his nerves again.

But this time, it didn’t stop.

Hayasaka: “ *Gh* …!”

Brian: “Huh? Hayasaka…?”

Hayasaka sucked in a sharp breath through his clenched teeth, holding his stomach as he struggled to remain balanced on the chair. He wasn't able to mask the pain this time, as Brian had rushed back over to him.

Brian: "Are—Are you alright?"

Hayasaka: "I-I'm fine…"

Brian: "Have you been eating enough? Hey, maybe you shouldn't skip out on those meals…"

Hayasaka: "Thank you for the groundbreaking advice."

Brian: "Hayasaka, I'm serious. Have—Have you been eating anything at all?"

Hayasaka: "And what if I told you I haven't? Are you going to strap me down and force feed me?"

Brian: "You… You haven't…?"

Hayasaka: "Why can't you take a simple hint for once in your life? Would it kill you to— *Urk* …!"

Hayasaka felt his stomach pierce over with sharp stings, making his head waver and limbs weaken. Collapsing to his knees, his hands curled into the carpet to stabilise himself, but it was so hard with his blurry vision and skin drenched in sweat.

Brian: "Hayasaka…!"

Brian jumped down to his side.

Brian: “You–You can barely even function! Why have you been living like this?”

Hayasaka had been tipped off by his harsher tone, glaring up at him through his matted bangs. He didn’t get the chance to open his mouth to respond before Brian scooped up a forkful of something from a plate and held it out in front of his lips. An overwhelming nausea washed over him, and he whipped his head away from the food.

Brian’s eyes widened. Then, he frowned deeply. Hayasaka jumped as he felt a hand wrap over his shoulder and pull him forward towards the other. Brian jabbed the fork closer to his mouth, but Hayasaka pursed his lips tightly.

Brian: “Come on…! Just one bite! You need it!”

Hayasaka: “Gh…! Nn…!”

Only grunts and noises of disagreement from Hayasaka sounded out as the two continued to struggle against one another. Brian wasn’t the strongest, but Hayasaka was just too weak to resist. Gritting his teeth, he seethed out a provocation.

Hayasaka: “ *Just pry my mouth open already if you’re so desperate* .”

Brian: “No…! I’m not going to hurt you! Why won’t you just accept it?”

He didn’t bother responding, causing Brian to finally pull his arm away from Hayasaka frustratedly. He wiped something from his eye, shoulders trembling.

Brian: “If–If you don’t eat something, you’ll die…!”

Hayasaka: “ *That’s the point* .”

Brian fell quiet.

Hayasaka: “Look around you. I’m trapped in a room that won’t let me die, watched over by people who won’t let me choose. So, I lie to them. I tell them what they want to hear, and nothing more. Do you know how difficult it is to dispose of food down a drain? I’ve found that as long as I don’t let it digest, it’s much easier to force myself to throw it all up instead.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “I don’t care how long it takes, as long as that day comes where I don’t have to do it anymore. We’ve let all these deaths happen, yet my clear wishes can’t even be accepted? I’m not trying to atone, I’m just trying to leave. So let me *leave* .”

Hayasaka let his eyes close. He didn’t care if he were to fall unconscious right then and there. At least now, Brian would finally understand.

Brian: “...No.”

Hayasaka snapped his eyes open. He watched as Brian placed one of the plates in front of where he was kneeling, and sat across from him. Not once did his eyes leave him.

Hayasaka: “What… the hell are you doing?”

Brian: “I’m gonna sit here until you eat everything on that plate.”

Brian remained still, face hardened to counter his once damp eyes. Pursing his lips, Hayasaka shot a dark look towards the other. Even if the fight wasn’t physical anymore, he was still determined to win. He crossed his arms over his aching stomach. Silence was the only thing that passed between the two for some time—Hayasaka couldn’t tell minutes from seconds, but it didn’t matter as long as he won.

And he was going to win.

Brian: “Who are you trying to prove yourself to?”

Brian’s question made him physically pause. Hayasaka opened his mouth to speak, but found no words could come out. This question was actually forcing him to think for an answer.

Hayasaka: “...No one. Don’t you get it? I really can’t go on.”

Brian: “Why not?”

Hayasaka: “Because I can’t.”

Brian: “Yes you can. Because if you really couldn’t, then you would have done something more drastic.”

Hayasaka faltered. Brian dragged his knees up to his chest.

Brian: “If you really wanted to die, you would have done so already. You could have snuck out of your room and found a weapon. You would have just… found some insane way to do it. But what you’ve chosen to do… It’s like you’re prolonging things, because it’s easier to not do something than take action. It’s as if you don’t know if this is what you really want.”

Heat rose from the pit of Hayasaka’s gut.

Hayasaka: “What the hell do you know about me?”

Brian: “I don’t know. I feel like I know nothing about you. Are you going to prove me wrong?”

The proposition hung in the air for some time. Hayasaka curled up a fist, only to promptly let it go. What was going on? His mind was so hazy.

The plate of food was right beside him. Was it always that closeby? He could pick up the fork without stretching his arm out too far.

What was that about winning again?

One bite turned into two, into four and into more as the sensation from Hayasaka's stomach begged in joy. His body grew warm, and before he knew it, he had finished the whole plate.

Brian: "...Ah. Haha. You downed that in… what? Maybe a minute?"

Brian's brighter tone brought upon a weird feeling he pushed away. Dropping the fork, Hayasaka met his eyes.

Brian: "Thank you, Hayasaka."

Brian smiled. Hayasaka couldn't remember the last time he did.

Hayasaka: "...Right."

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[12:15PM] Hayasaka: I didn't mention this before but I liked that coffee you made on our cafe date

Setting aside his tablet, Hayasaka stared up at the ceiling.

Brian: "You really seem to like that chair a lot, huh?"

Today, Brian had returned yet again. As Hayasaka allowed for his previous meal to digest this time, it was a little easier for him to pick himself up and walk towards the door when he heard the usual knock. He had more control over his limbs, and he could even think more beforehand on what he wanted to say. Yet somehow, he still wasn't able to refuse Brian's company. He sat opposite him on the edge of the bed, mood even brighter than the day before.

Hayasaka: "It's not mine. It came from Saiki's room when he teleported me back here one night. No one took it away."

Brian: "Oh… Hey, so you've eaten breakfast today. That's good."

Brian gestured to the clean plate that sat on the table. Hayasaka tapped his foot.

Brian: "I didn't tell the others about what happened yesterday. I mean, I know I should have, but… I couldn't find anyone. And, well, I had a feeling you wouldn't want me to, anyway."

Hayasaka remained silent, staring at the other. It irked him how there was something here that shouldn't be, so he had to keep looking, to make sure the other knew he didn't like it. And Brian knew he was under his watchful gaze, because he kept staring back. Somehow, it brought upon a familiar scenario in Hayasaka's mind.

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka, who hadn't spoken up at all thus far, glanced around the group. Most appeared tired, which he could relate to a little too well. As he was looking around, his eyes landed on Brian, who he realised hadn't spoken a word either. Just then, Brian caught eye-contact with him, and the two awkwardly reverted their sight away from each other. Hayasaka felt his cheeks heat up in embarrassment.

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("That was the first night. I'm doing it again, ironically.")

Brian: "Hayasaka… If there's something you want to say, then you can tell me."

Hayasaka: “...You need me to say it out loud?”

Brian: “I do.”

Hayasaka: “Then tell me. Why do you keep coming here? Why do you keep making things so difficult for me?”

Hayasaka played his tone cold, and Brian rubbed his arm before letting out a soft sigh.

Brian: “I don’t think… I can give up on you.”

Hayasaka: “...That’s it? You’re not serious, are you?”

Brian: “I am.”

Hayasaka: “I won’t apologise, you know? For the things I did. I called you an idiot. You still are one. I said you ruined everything. You still are doing just that. I didn’t say anything when Kurumada admitted he was supposed to kill you. I still haven't said anything now.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “...Why’re you putting up with this? I’m not your ally. I’m not your *friend* . I want Kurumada back. I’d rather you had all died instead of him. Is that enough to get you to realise why you should leave me alone?”

Brian: “So why did you still help *me* ?”

Hayasaka: “...Excuse me?”

Brian: “You keep acting like you don’t care about me, and yet when you saw my leg was still weighing me down, you told me to rest.”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Go rest for god’s sake. Don’t go walking around if your injury’s still straining you.”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “Even when your words were harsh, your face was so gentle. You probably didn’t realise it yourself. That’s when it hit me. All of this? It’s not what you really think, is it? You’re just pretending to be rude, so you can feel justified for pushing me away.”

Hayasaka: “ *All of this* is the truth. Do you really think this is all some elaborate lie?”

Brian: “I don’t know. But it’s definitely not all there is to it, either. That’s why I decided to hold out for as long as I could when I waited for you to eat yesterday. I can’t be certain of what you really feel, and I can’t be certain of what you say that isn’t true. But most of all, if I don’t try, then I’ll never find out. I want to find that gentleness again—I want to find *you* again.”

Hayasaka: “Find me…? What is there to find? This is who I am, and this is how I feel. You won’t find what isn’t there.”

Brian: “So why did you eat? Why are you letting me sit here with you right now?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “Haah, this is… difficult. In fact, I don’t think I’ve been so unsure in my life. I can’t forgive Kurumada for what he did to me. But… I want to forgive you, somehow. After all, the things you did, the things you said… I think there was a reason for it. A reason I’ll never understand, maybe, but a reason nonetheless.”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “And… Before everything went wrong, you were the only one there for me. When I felt stupid and isolated, it was you who told me to keep going. Even when you lashed out at me, I’ve found now that I can’t ignore that. I mean, you’ve done so much for me. Like when you sat with me at the restaurant, and when you invited me to the book club, and when we’d investigate together, and when you aided my injury. If that isn’t a friend, I guess I wouldn’t want anything else.”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t understand. The things I did before—they don’t mean anything now.”

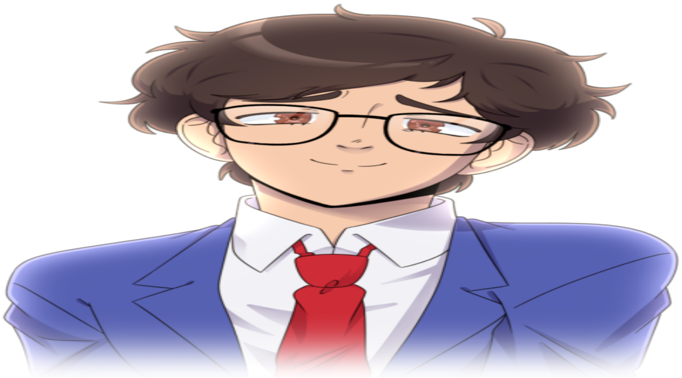
Brian: “I think they do. Because you’ve shown me deep down that you still want to do them.”

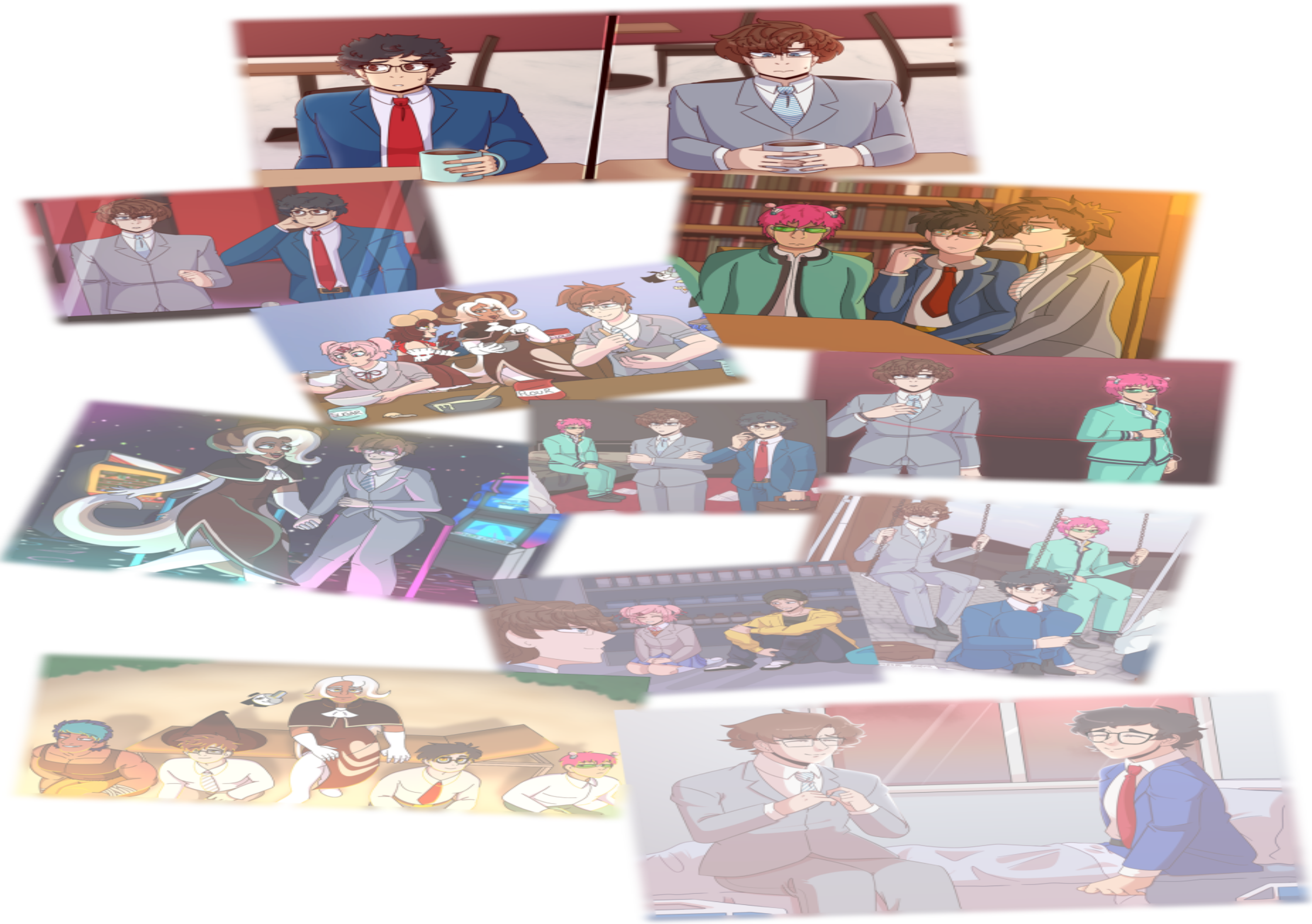
Hayasaka: “...”

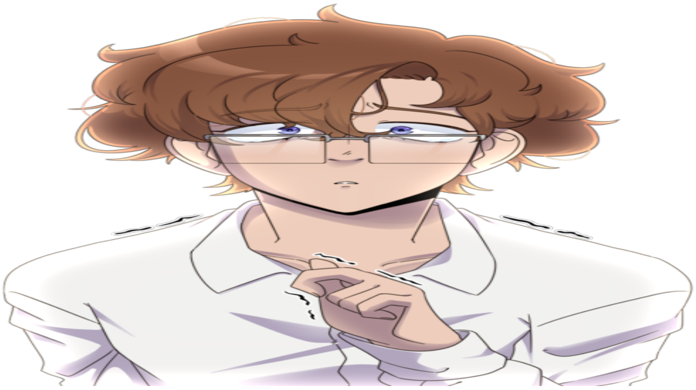
Brian: “...Look. It was hard when I lost L. He was gone before I could repay him for everything he had done for me. I wanted to prove him right: that I do have potential. But, I’m not going to let the same thing happen to you. I’m going to be the friend that you were when I was at my lowest—no, even more than that. And I know the others feel the same, too. With all you’ve done for them, that’s why they want to protect you. They’re not doing this so you can’t choose—they’re doing this so you won’t make the wrong choice. So I won’t sit back and let you either.”

Brian shook his head, and smiled softly.

Brian: “Maybe I’m just too nice. Maybe… I’ll put up with what you say now, if it means I can be at your side. Because you didn’t give up on me then, I don’t want to give up on you now.”







Hayasaka: “...Shut up… S-Shut up…”

Brian: “Huh…?”

Where did the tears come from now? Hayasaka didn’t know, but they weren’t going to stop.

Hayasaka: “You’re kind. You’re too kind to me and I hate it. I could tell you to go to hell and you’d still be here, won’t you?”

Brian: “H-Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka: “This isn’t fair. Who even are you? Why does my chest feel so tight? Why do I feel so—so *rotten* ?”

Hayasaka’s head hung low as he hunched into himself.

Hayasaka: “I don’t… understand. It’s just like they said…”

FLASHBACK

Mai: “I want you both to be strong, and to rely on each other and the friends that you’ve made here to help you.”

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “Hey, Hayasaka. How about them? Don’t ya love them too?”

Hayasaka: “I… O-Of course I do.”

Kurumada: “Then you have nothin’ to worry about.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “But even so… there isn’t any point in going on. *Nwuh* …?”

Something warm gently grasped his hand, and he glanced up to see Brian was much closer to him now. But it didn’t feel bad at all.

It was *nice* .

Brian: “Then do it for me.”

Hayasaka: “You… What?”

Brian: “Y-Yes, I know that sounds selfish now that I’ve said it out loud. But still…! If you’re unsure whether to go on, then wouldn’t the best thing to do is stay here until you make up your mind?”

Hayasaka: “Staying here…”

Brian: “Just a little longer. So when the time comes, you can tell me what you want to do. What do you think of that?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t particularly trust myself on that. And no one else does.”

Hayasaka gestured around the room. Brian glanced down, before giving him a soft look.

Brian: “...I trust you. I trust you can find the right choice, even if it’s hard.”

Hayasaka: “...I don’t think I can do that on my own.”

Brian: “Then I’ll stay here with you. No, I’ll stay by your side as long as you need it.”

There was a mature tenderness that resonated from Brian’s eyes, and it was the only thing Hayasaka wanted to look at. He trembled, squeezing the other’s hand.

Hayasaka: “...I-I see. Then, I suppose… I can try…”

Letting his tears run freely down his cheeks, Hayasaka closed his eyes. Any time a wandering thought would slip into his mind, he dragged his thumb across Brian’s palm, and distracted himself with the warmth. Breath by breath, the weight in his chest folded down until the pain was not gone, but tolerable.

Brian: “...How are you doing now?”

Hayasaka: “I’ve stopped crying.”

Brian: “That’s probably a good sign, right?”

Hayasaka: “...Brian.”

Brian: “Yeah?”

Hayasaka: “Why did you come to my door in the first place? Before I even spoke to you, what pushed you to want to see me?”

Brian: “It was my last resort, really. I wasn’t sure how it was going to go, but I had nothing to lose at that point.”

Hayasaka: “Because no one else wants to talk to you.”

Brian: “Y…Yep…”

Shoulders slumping, Brian bit his lip. Hayasaka remained quiet, a sign for the other to explain himself.

Brian: “It—Well, it all began after the trial. I had stayed behind for a little while after you guys had left, but the next morning, I overheard a commotion coming from inside the restaurant. I decided to peek my head in, and that’s when I saw everyone else discussing what they were going to do next.”

FLASHBACK

Latte: “Good morning, everyone.”

Natsuki: “...”

Latte: “...How is his room looking now?”

Jesse: “I’ve padded up about half of the furniture. What should we do with all the shit we hauled outta his room?”

Latte: “I suppose leaving it in one of the empty halls won’t do much harm.”

Natsuki: “Are we sure this is even gonna work? I mean, what if he wakes up and sees what we’ve done to his room, and he just, you know, gets even more pissed off?”

Saiki: “ *He won’t do that* .”

Natsuki: “And how would you know? It’s not like any of us expected he’d do *that* after the execution, a-and—”

Jesse: “Hey, Nat, take a breather, alright? I know it’s a lot to handle, but you gotta stay calm for him.”

Natsuki: “I know, but… It’s just difficult. It’s really, really fucking difficult.”

Latte: “Yes, this is… a tough situation for us all to be in. I hate having to do this as much as everyone else. But, we can’t afford to falter anymore.”

Natsuki: “...Yeah, you’re right. But, I still feel like it’s not right for us to do this.”

Saiki: “ *Because it’s not.* ”

Latte: “Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *I’m not saying this is a bad idea. We don’t have a lot of other options. But I still dislike the way we’re going about it.* ”

Jesse: “So what do you suppose we do?”

Saiki: “ *We should keep his door unlocked* .”

Natsuki: “Unlocked? Are you sure?”

Saiki: “ *Yes. He needs to know he has autonomy.* ”

Jesse: “Autonomy?”

Saiki: " *If we just trap him in his room, then he'll see us as his captors. He should be able to know he's free to leave whenever he wants, without us doubting his intentions. We should let him choose what he needs and when. That goes for his time alone, too. If someone else was there, it'll only make things worse . He needs time, just like you all did. If someone forced him away from that time, not only would it overwhelm him, but it would send the message that we don't care about his space . If I never had that freedom to make up my mind…* "

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: "I… I-It's me, Hayasaka, haha… I just wanted to check up on you. I'm… worried about you…"

…

Hayasaka: "Y-You haven't been to the new island yet, have you? Would you like to come take a tour with me, perhaps?"

…

Hayasaka: "...I won't leave you alone, if that's what you want."

FLASHBACK END

Saiki: " *...Then I don't know if I would be standing here right now* ."

Natsuki: "Saiki…"

Latte: "I'm glad you shared that with us, Saiki. I think we should consider Hayasaka's needs like that as well. After all, what he's going through… I know what it's like. For some, it's not an easy feat to overcome in a day, or even a few. I really want to do all I can to make this process as comforting as possible for him."

Jesse: “Yeah, he’s not really the type’a guy to bounce back that fast, huh? I respect that, though.”

Latte: “Still, how would we know if something were to happen to him?”

Saiki: “ *I’ll make sure to check up on him with my clairvoyance regularly. That way, none of us will have to physically interrupt him* .”

Jesse: “Do you… got any plans if something does happen?”

Saiki: “ *...I’ll deal with it if it ever comes to that point* .”

Latte: “May I go to him to bring him something to eat from time to time?”

Natsuki: “Me too—whenever I can pick myself up to bake again.”

Saiki: “ *As long as you only knock and leave the food outside his door* .”

Brian: “...”

Latte: “...Huh? Brian?”

Brian: “A-Ah, um…”

Saiki: “ *How long have you been standing there by the door* ?”

Brian: “Not long…”

Jesse: “Anyway… Hey, Nat. I think I might just chill in my room today. Wanna bring over your manga again?”

Natsuki: “Yeah, I guess I don’t mind that.”

Latte: “Moony, would you like to help me pick out some fruits Hayasaka might like to eat?”

Moony: “Fruits, huh? Are you callin’ him a fruity man? I guess I didn’t see him as a veggie lover.”

Brian: “Huh? Wait, why are you all making plans like that? Don’t you guys… want to do something more productive?”

Saiki: “ *I’m going to be working more on my powers. I think that’s productive enough* .”

Brian: “No, I mean… How about our goal? To stop the death game? To solve the mystery behind Nesos? With what we learned yesterday, don’t you all feel like we can do something with that?”

Latte: “...Not today, dear.”

Brian: “What…?”

Saiki: “ *This mystery nonsense should have died alongside L. Nesos don’t need any mysteries of theirs to be solved by us. They just need to be taken down.* ”

Brian: “But, isn’t that how we’re going to take them down? We’re closer than ever to exposing their identity. We shouldn’t give up now, even if there’s someone who—”

Natsuki: “Give up? That’s what you think we’re doing here?”

Brian: “Well… I just don’t understand why you all—after everything that’s happened to us—aren’t willing to—”

Jesse: “Dude, just lay off it, alright? It’s not that we don’t care. It’s that we just… can’t. I’m tired of being in the crossfire of other people’s bullshit. L with his fake bomb scare, and then Kurumada workin’ for Nesos this whole time—it just feels like no one gives a shit about us.”

Latte: “It’s been tough on all of us since this trial, and I’m sure you feel similar, Brian. Why don’t you take a bit of a breather before jumping into anything heavy like that?”

Brian: “I–I can’t do that…! What’s left if we don’t do anything? We can’t wait around, because that’ll just allow Nesos to provoke us with another motive…!”

Saiki: “*There’s not going to be another murder. We haven’t heard from Monotora nor Nesos since the trial.*”

Natsuki: “Now that you mention it… Monotora would always show up here the day after a trial. In fact, we haven’t seen them at all since Kurumada’s execution.”

Jesse: “Motive or not, murder’s the last thing on our minds. And who cares? Apart from that, we don’t have any other goals we can realistically strive for.”

Brian: “I… don’t understand. If we don’t solve this mystery—a-and I mean, we’re not going in blind with this—we can use what L left behind to help us!”

Saiki: “ *Let’s say you’re right, and we did figure something out. What are we meant to do with it? Tell someone? Who* ?”

Brian: “N…Nesos, of course!”

Natsuki: “And what are Nesos gonna do? The last time you tried throwing out a theory that challenged them, they completely brushed you off! They’re not gonna magically let us go just because we solved who they are.”

Latte: “I feel… it’s much more important we focus on us, rather than them. We’re not in a state where we can easily move forward with anything, so I want to be there to care for those who need it. Especially Hayasaka.”

Brian: “...”

Saiki: “ *...You actually care about him, right* ?”

Brian: “I… I’m just thinking about ending these horrible things happening to us.”

Jesse: “If you were, then you’d actually listen to what we’re tryn’a tell you.”

Brian: “Have any of you ever listened to *me* ?”

Latte: “Huh?”

Brian: “I’m always treated like I’m just… not there. And if I am, it’s just to push me around. Yet, I worked so hard—I worked so hard for the sake of everyone, and what did I get in return?”

Natsuki: “But we have been there for you. When you got attacked, we all came to see you. We even put together that breakfast for you.”

Brian: “And yet none of you came back to see me again. In fact, did any of you ever care that I could’ve died before in the vents? Did any of you ever care over the fact I was supposed to be *killed* during my attack?”

Latte: “No one should have been allowed to go through such a thing. There’s nothing wrong in wanting to appreciate making it out alive.”

Brian: “You’re missing the point! Making it out alive? I could be dead! I could’ve died and no one’s said a word! But when *he* gets upset—”

Saiki: “ *He? Are you talking about Hayasaka* ?”

Jesse: “Dude, he lost someone he loved—”

Brian: “ *Someone who was going to kill me…* !”

Latte: “Brian—”

Brian: “No! What am I supposed to do when I’m betrayed by someone I thought I could trust? By someone I cared for, and who I thought cared for me? When my body realised this before I did, it stopped me before I could make a fool of myself any further. It told me, no, you don’t need to cater towards someone who clearly doesn’t favour you. So tell me, what am I supposed to do?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t care what you do. Because I don’t want to listen to someone so selfish* .”

Brian: “S… *Selfish* …?”

Natsuki: “You know, even if what you’re saying is right, and we could get something out of your way… Why would I want to do it with you? You don’t care what the rest of us want.”

Brian: “I… I do… That’s why… I want to…”

Latte: “Brian, please. Arguing about this won’t do you any good. It’s best to calm down, okay?”

Brian: “...”

Saiki: “ *...I didn’t expect you to throw your allies under the bus. It’s shameful* .”

Jesse: “Wh… Hang on. You’re one to talk. You–You literally did that to me and Nat in the trial!”

Natsuki: “Were you ever going to apologise for that? I could let it slide since we had the case to focus on, but how come you haven’t said anything now?”

Saiki: “ *What I did is irrelevant to this. I wasn’t doing it out of spite* .”

Latte: “It is true you didn’t know you hadn’t killed L, so you made up a lie only out of guilt of being caught. That I can excuse. But, why did you have to hurt those two to do so?”

Saiki: “...?”

Natsuki: “It wouldn’t have been hard to blame someone from Nesos instead. After all, there was literal evidence for it. I mean, those nasty things you said about us, did you even have to say them for the sake of your fabrication, or did you use it as an excuse to say what you really felt?”

Saiki: “ *So what? Are you going to get divided over what I did, in comparison to everything that Nesos has done? You can’t fight the both of us* .”

Jesse: “It’s not about that! Why would I wanna fight alongside someone who I can’t trust not to exploit my regrets—and the regrets of my friend—and use them for his own gain?”

Saiki: “ *And why would I want to fight alongside someone who can’t see what I’ve had to sacrifice of my own identity just to do the right thing* ?”

Latte: “Goodness! Let’s drop this idea of fighting, alright? We’re not going to be able to do any of the sort where we’re at right now.”

Natsuki: “You’re right. We can’t accomplish anything—but that’s what frustrates me. I want to do something, yet what’s the point if we just end up like this again and again? I don’t even know who I should be mad at anymore!”

Jesse: “C’mon, Nat. You don’t gotta be around this. Let’s just bounce.”

Natsuki: “Yeah… Whatever.”

Saiki: “ *...I’m not going to stick around where I don’t need to, either* .”

Moony: “Jeeze, where are those losers going? Oh well. Hey, cookie lady, what now?”

Latte: “ *Sigh* , let’s… let’s go pick that fruit, and then… I need a coffee.”

Brian: “...”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “...After that, everyone stopped talking to each other. Sometimes I’d run into someone, but they’d just walk past me like I wasn’t even there.”

Hayasaka: “Haha…”

Brian: “Huh?”

Hayasaka: “So, you did hate me.”

Brian: “N–No, I…”

Hayasaka: “I don’t blame you for getting mad. In fact, I would’ve been more annoyed if you didn’t. I was awfully nasty to you.”

Brian: “But, you’re not—because you’re the one who always made sure I was alright. I only pushed that aside in my frustration towards you. I was selfish.”

Hayasaka: “Shut up. You’re everything but selfish, Brian. If there’s anyone on this island that’s selfish, it’s me. I want a dead man back—you just want to be acknowledged.”

Brian: “Hayasaka—”

Hayasaka: “And I’m not arguing about that.”

Brian: “ *Sigh* … O-Okay. Heh, you know, this abrasiveness from you, it’s sort of… strange. But, I also don’t mind it. It feels like you’re more confident to speak your mind now.”

Hayasaka: “Really…? Maybe I’ve just…”

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “You deserve to say whatever the hell you want, feel whatever the hell you want! I’ve seen what you’re capable of when you’re the most honest with yourself.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...Had a change of heart.”

Brian: “Either way, I’ll just have to get used to it.”

Hayasaka: “Still, that’s really why the others did this for me?”

Brian: “Yeah, they cared about you a whole lot. It might’ve been hard to see from the inside, but I think you deserve to know their intentions. *Even if I sort of brushed that aside myself at the time* …”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Brian: “So, uh, following on from everyone splitting up, I decided to continue digging around on my own. I guess I thought I was only really good for trying to pick back up on what L left behind. Speaking of which, I managed to find some stuff in his room.”

Hayasaka: “His room? How’d you even get inside? Unless you’re going to tell me he really was that insane to leave his room unlocked.”

Brian: “Haah, thankfully not. I didn’t mention this during the investigation, but when no one was looking, I sort of… took L’s room key from him.”

Hayasaka: “So, you are a pick-pocketer.”

Brian: “I-I’m not!”

Hayasaka: “It’s just a joke. I’ll try and make a good one, one day.”

Brian: “Oh… W-Well, I only really took it in case we needed to find clues in his hotel room. I made the right call though, because I found a tape recorder that L had left a pretty hefty confession on. I was actually… debating on whether I should let you listen to it, and I think you should.”

Hayasaka: “Oh?”

Turning briefly to reach into his pocket, Brian pulled out the tape recorder, and handed it to Hayasaka. He slid his thumb on top of the play button, and clicked it down.

L: “ *If you have found this tape, that means you have gained access to my hotel room. I do not intend to let anyone inside after making this recording, so I assume you have taken my key off my person. That’s why I’ve made sure to keep it in an easily reachable pocket.* ”

Hayasaka: “So in reality, he was trying to bait someone the whole time…”

L: “ *If things are successful, I should be dead. Well, I may not be, but I am fully prepared to sacrifice my life for this plan.* ”

Hayasaka: “I’m sure you’re not worrying much about that now.”

Brian: “You know, all this commentary is great, b-but you should really focus on what he’s going to say…”

L: “ *Firstly, I did not anticipate my priorities to be revised this quickly. However, due to recent events, I’m more inclined to focus on the identity of the traitor more than ever. Initially, I did not have a lot of facts at my disposal, but ever since Brian’s attack, the pieces began to add up. This isn’t as a means to tick off some side mystery—oh, no. Once the traitor has been made clear, the identity of Nesos will naturally be exposed alongside it. This is to be achieved even if some people are to die—myself included* .

I’ll begin with the basic facts. Brian was attacked by none other than the traitor. It wasn’t just a random member of Nesos, nor whoever was given Brian as their target in the motive. This explanation falls in line best with Nesos’ overall plans. Their smartest move was to rely on a mole—someone they could easily cut contact with any time things went sour. I acknowledge it’s impossible for me to identify who this is explicitly at this time. However, with careful deduction, I was able to cut down the possibilities. All I need to do is allow things to be confirmed with my upcoming scheme.

Before I move on, I would like to touch upon my personal theory, from this event alone, on the identity of Nesos and its mastermind. The— ”

KSSHHH

Hayasaka: “Huh? What happened to the audio?”

Brian: “I don’t know. That happened to me when I listened to it for the first time, too. I thought it was somehow my fault, but it always did that each time I played it again. I guess L ended up choosing a tape recorder with some issues.”

Hayasaka: “That’s annoying. I was interested in what he was going to say about Nesos.”

Brian: “Yeah, me too. But, uh, I think this is the part where he comes back.”

L: “ *—And from this, I can conclude the traitor was blackmailed into working for Nesos, rather than from having a will to join. As for the traitor’s identity themselves, it’s simplest to work backwards and confirm who it cannot be. The first is Brian—the victim of the traitor’s attack. Next would be Hayasaka. Brian made it clear in his retelling that Hayasaka’s presence was elsewhere during the attack.*

However, one part that sticks out to me is how the traitor supposedly fled when Hayasaka had called out onto the floor. It would’ve been most logical for them to take down Hayasaka too, would it not? Even if Nesos instructed the traitor to only attack Brian, I assume most of you would attempt to minimise witnesses to complete the task, so as to not face repercussions. Especially if said witness was someone that posed no real challenge.

Of course, there is one individual that is exempt from this idea—someone who would not want to hurt Hayasaka, nor get caught in the act by him, either: Kurumada. There is a slim chance this same thought process could be applied to Saiki, but I disregard him due to a separate theory. I also have to acknowledge the possibility that the traitor simply chose to flee as to not get caught regardless, but I am not one to second doubt myself. ”

Hayasaka: “So… L figured out it was Kurumada the same way I did.”

Brian: “He’s still so incredible even after he’s gone, isn’t he?”

Hayasaka: “I feel like my realisation has less merit now, knowing he got it first.”

Brian: “Great minds think alike…?”

Hayasaka: “I’m not sure whether that’s more insulting towards me or L.”

Brian: “I-I see…”

L: “ *With the theory out of the way, I now move onto my plan. My goal is plain and simple: to create a scenario where the traitor has no choice but to out themselves, and allow their actions to expose the identity of the mastermind.* ”

Hayasaka: “What? But, Kurumada never told us anything about the mastermind’s identity.”

Brian: “Well, other than that they preferred to be called the CEO, I guess.”

Hayasaka: (“But…”)

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “That’s where I was brought to… the self-proclaimed CEO of Nesos.”

Jesse: “CEO? You mean like, the mastermind?”

Brian: “You know the person controlling Nesos? Who is it?”

Kurumada: “...”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“...He looked so afraid when he was asked about them. Was… he repressing something?”)

Brian: “I’m sure whatever L’s talking about was mentioned in the corrupted part before. It’s still kinda unfortunate for us, though…”

L: “ *I won’t go into details of my plan as I’m sure you will have figured out the truth behind it by now, but I do apologise for the scare I have caused. I will reiterate to you all: the bombs were never meant to put anyone in danger. They were made solely to provoke Nesos. Why, you might ask? Well, I’m sure one of you will figure that part out.* ”

Hayasaka: “What does *that* even mean? I don’t think anyone knows why he felt such an extreme cause was even necessary.”

Brian: “Maybe the ‘will figure’ means we might eventually…?”

L: “ *My intentions were to make it appear the bombs were as real as they could be. While I did claim I had reconfigured the bombs for ill-intent, in reality I simply re-coded them so that they would not go off at all. I even made a big show of hiding the bombs, just so Nesos could witness me do so. To prevent them from finding the bombs themselves and effectively ending my plan before it could begin, I utilised camera blind spots and a few of my own special techniques. In fact, not even I know where a few bombs ended up—that’s just how hidden they are.*

Regardless, I am certain Nesos will send out their traitor to threaten me over the bombs, knowing they have become more active in such schemes ever since Brian’s attack. Once the traitor confirms their identity to me, only then will I reveal that the bombs are fake. If they react to my expectations, then my theories thus far would be confirmed. If not… Well, we’ll just have to see when the time comes.

Now, I am fully aware of Nesos’ growing aggression due to recent events, and I acknowledge the possibility that they will not hold back their brutality in their confrontation with me. In the case I do not make it out alive, I entrust the rest of you to use all the evidence left behind to expose the traitor. If my theory on their identity is correct, then I apologise to Hayasaka in advance for what will happen. I’m weary on whether or not Nesos will kill Kurumada—but if they do, it’ll be out of an act of power to intimidate you all. I advise that the best course of action is to just accept what happens. Otherwise, you will risk your own lives if you cannot move past it and expose Nesos’ weakness to escape the death game. ”

Hayasaka: “I bet you gave yourself a big pat on the back for that advice. *Bastard* .”

Brian: "..."

L: " *With all of that covered, I want to move onto a special message I wish to leave for Brian. Brian, as you know, our time together has—* "

CLICK

Before another word could be uttered out from the recording, Brian had snatched the tape recorder and clicked the pause button.

Brian: "Ah, uh, heheh. D-Do you mind if we leave that part out? It's a bit of a… personal message—like he said. I don't really… feel comfortable with anyone else hearing it, if that's okay."

Hayasaka: "Not that I'd get much out of it. You're free to keep it to yourself."

Brian: "Thanks… Erm, I just hope you could, you know, find a little closure after hearing what L said."

Hayasaka: "I don't know. Nothing he said made me feel anything other than indifferent. It's like he didn't care about the impact of anyone's death, even if he kept claiming he didn't mind dying as well. L always cared more about solving some mystery than our lives—which is probably why he coped better than any of us could."

Brian: "That's one way of looking at it. For me, though, I see L's methods as something we can't understand, but ultimately always have us in mind. After all, he could've just killed us all with actual bombs if he didn't feel like we mattered to solving the mystery."

Hayasaka: "..."

FLASHBACK

Yuri: “In order to prevent this from happening again, the only possible way was to end everything quickly. In other words, *killing everyone as soon as possible* .”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “ *Ah… Ahh … Urk* —...!”

An overwhelming bile pricked the back of Hayasaka’s throat, and his hands dived to cover his mouth.

Brian: “H-Hayasaka!”

Brian held a hand out, but Hayasaka swallowed it all back down with a heavy heart.

Hayasaka: “I’m–I’m fine. I just… want this all to end.”

The words he murmured tickled his dry lips. Picking his head up, he saw Brian hold his chin in thought.

Brian: “I get what you mean. I think… it would be bad to let everyone drift apart any longer. But, as much as I want to, I’m scared of going back out and trying to convince the others of the same sentiment. I seem to keep saying things that only make things worse.”

Hayasaka: “That’s not really your fault, is it?”

Brian: “S-Still…”

Hayasaka: “...”

FLASHBACK

Brian: “Because of what you’ve done for me then, I don’t want to give up on you now.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...Hey, Brian. What time is it right now?”

Brian: “Huh? Uh, I think it’s… sometime past midday. Why?”

Hayasaka: “So, they shouldn’t be hard to find, right?”

Brian’s face was blank at his words. Then, his eyes widened in realisation.

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Loafers crunching down on the familiar grains of sand, Hayasaka drew in a sharp breath of the salty air. His body was still coming to terms with the gift of fresh air after so many days in his stuffy room, so his steps were slow and light. It didn’t take long to spy two figures sitting closeby to the tide: Natsuki and Jesse.

Flipping every so often through the pages of her manga, Natsuki huddled into herself tightly, as if to fend everyone off from her own fantasy world of whatever plot could gratify her. Jesse, on the other hand, found his interest in skipping stones as far as he could into the ocean. He had a generous pile of all sorts of stones beside him, to which he’d continuously grab one from and toss out onto the blue horizon, muttering to himself every time the stone would give up and sink deep into the depths below. One could argue such activities were vastly mismatched, and that neither of the two really needed to be together to do so. However, Hayasaka knew neither of them would be doing anything without the other beside them. It was a matter of comfort—the presence of another to shield those nasty thoughts that fought to get in their way.

Thankfully, all he had to do was press his heel down a little tougher into the sand to make their heads snap over to his direction. As he approached closer, the shock on their faces was much easier to see. He knew it could’ve been worse: that’s why he smoothed out his hair, shirt, and chucked on his blazer to not appear so terrible. Then again, he was sure nothing could draw their attention away from his sunken eyes. But, he could live with that, because he frankly didn't care.

Without a word of acknowledgement, Hayasaka kneeled down to pick up a stone from Jesse's pile. Turning to face the ocean, he lugged it as hard as he could muster, only for the stone to splash right into the depths pretty pathetically. When he glanced back at them, they just looked back, stunned. Hayasaka smiled.

Hayasaka: "Haha, I'm sorry. I don't quite know how to do that properly."

Jesse: "Hey, uh… You gotta put more force in your arm. Like this."

Clearly unsure of what he was doing, but doing it anyway, Jesse stood up as he grabbed another stone for himself. He made a show of his throw, and they watched the stone skip a few times across the ocean's surface. Hayasaka attempted to recreate what he saw, and managed to make the stone skip once very briefly before its demise. Jesse nodded at him, giving a lopsided grin.

Jesse: "Yeah, you got it. You just need to practise a lil' more."

Natsuki, who was previously watching the two from above the pages of her manga, rose from the sand and picked up a stone. She tossed it harshly towards the ocean, and quite like Hayasaka's first attempt, it dived into the water, although causing a much bigger splash.

Natsuki: " *Damnit* ."

Jesse: "Damn, that was a powerful throw. You got demons or something?"

Natsuki: "Shut up—I did it just like you did."

Jesse: "Well now I wanna see if I can make a bigger splash than yours."

Natsuki: "You're on."

The two shifted their game onto throwing stones as hard as they could into the ocean, Hayasaka watching on in earnest. Once all the stones had been lost to the sea, Jesse scooped up a fistful of sand and attempted to toss that, only for the wind to blow it back into his face.

Jesse: “Argh—motherfucker!”

Natsuki: “Hahaha! What the hell, Jesse? What did you think was gonna happen?”

Jesse: “I–I dunno! I was just in the zone, alright?”

Hayasaka: “Hahaha…”

Hayasaka’s chuckle caused the two to turn their attention back to him, and their faces fell in line with something more solemn.

Jesse: “It’s, uh, good to see you again, Mr. Hayasaka.”

Natsuki: “Yeah. But, why did you want to do that? I thought you’d want to speak to us or something.”

Hayasaka: “Honestly, I’ve had enough of speaking. And that looked like a fun way to relieve some anger.”

Crossing his arms, Hayasaka shook his head.

Hayasaka: “I’m sorry if I scared you before with my anger. I even scared myself.”

Jesse: “It’s all cool, man. You’ve seen just about enough of that from me.”

Natsuki: “Me too. I would’ve just felt like a hypocrite if I denied the fact I’ve felt that anger before.”

Hayasaka: “I see. Then, I wish I had somewhere to redirect it all.”

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...”

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Peering up at the early evening sky, Hayasaka adjusted his tie. He placed his hand on the handle of the cafe’s door, and pushed it open. The trill of the bell passed his ears as he stepped inside, spying its only patron. Alone on a closeby table sat Latte, hands wrapped around a pristine white cup. She was looking back at him on the account of the bell, face washed over in surprise. Quietly, he made his way towards her, and sat down in the chair opposite. Now closer, Hayasaka took notice of how her hat shifted around ever-so slightly on her head, where he assumed Moony must be resting.

Latte: “Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka: “What’re you drinking? It smells nice.”

Latte: “Huh? Oh, just… a simple herbal tea. I couldn’t bring myself to make much else.”

Hayasaka: “Have you ever tried black soybean tea?”

Latte: “I don’t think I have. Is that your favourite?”

Hayasaka: “Yes, only because it was Mai’s favourite first. I often found myself ordering it from her bakery since she always had a unique way of preparing it you just couldn’t get anywhere else. She made the flavours so rich, and drinking it gave me this… ‘you can make it through the day’ feeling.”

Latte: “Aw, that’s… so lovely, Hayasaka.”

Hayasaka: “Mai ended up giving me some tips on how to prepare it. I still remember them, so would you like to make it with me?”

Latte: “Really? Well…”

Hayasaka: “I know it won’t taste exactly like how Mai made it. But, I want to try and share that feeling with you as much as I can.”

Latte: “...Ah. Then, how can I say no?”

Moony: “Hey! I want in with this vitali- *tea* ! Heh, see what I did there?”

With a helping hand from Moony, Hayasaka and Latte went to brew the tea together. It was evident in her apprehensive movements around sharper objects in the cafe’s kitchen that Latte still bore concern over Hayasaka, but he didn’t mind that. He made sure to focus on the drink in front of him, smiling at her every so often to show where his priorities lay.

Once the tea was ready, they poured the hot brew into two tea cups—and one smaller cup for Moony. Hayasaka allowed Latte the first sip back at the table, and watched as her face slipped into bliss.

Latte: “Wow… This is incredible. It has such a warm, comforting taste. Even though you said it wouldn’t taste like how she made it, it really reminds me a lot of Mai.”

Hayasaka: “Perhaps that’s why I always liked it so much, really.”

Latte: “Thank you for sharing this tea with me, Hayasaka. I didn’t know how you were going to be when first I saw you walk in, but I’m so proud of how much you’ve been able to grow.”

Hayasaka: “I wouldn’t say I’ve grown at all. I just wanted to share something about a person we both love. I felt it was long overdue since our last time together like this.”

Latte: “You really are such a sweetheart, aren't you?”

Hayasaka: “I don’t know. I feel I’m only pushed forward by my regrets. There’s just… so much I wish I could do for those I love.”

Latte: “...”

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Drizzles of purple painted the sky darker and darker as Hayasaka made his way towards Nesos Park. Even as evening grew close, he found himself hardly tired at all. Sliding to a halt on his heel, he gazed at the wondrous view of the park. It wasn’t the trees swaying in the wind, nor the intricate statue that once captured his attention. It was the boy in the centre putting on quite the show.

Saiki had been at the park for a while, Hayasaka could only assume. From his wavering limbs to his sweaty appearance, he had been putting a lot of work towards his craft. All sorts of abilities were being put to the test over and over again: levitating objects, teleporting around to who knows where, and even throwing things like dumbbells as hard as he could to knock trees over. It was like a self-inflicted military course, because Saiki just never allowed himself the space to breathe, nor the time to blink.

And when he’d clench his teeth, or hold his stomach when a surge of pain would run through his body, he’d grab a pack of painkillers from a pile, pop out a handful of pills from the blister pack, chuck them down the back of his throat and swallow them raw before getting back to business. It was like the whole process was some sort of inconvenience to him. But he still did it, and Hayasaka felt glad that his advice did not fall onto deaf ears.

Hayasaka: “I’ve never seen someone work so hard since I’ve been on overtime at the office.”

His little comment all but startled Saiki into dropping the dumbbell he held up with his telekinesis, a reverberating thud causing the surrounding trees to shake in fear. Turning around slowly, his eyes locked onto the other. Hayasaka simply looked back with an idle smile.

Before Hayasaka could even think about letting another word escape into the night, a pair of arms locked tightly around his waist, pulling him close. Although this time, the air from his lungs wasn't knocked that harshly out from him. He wasn't even sure how it was possible for Saiki to have gotten so close without him realising—but then he remembered the boy could teleport. The embrace was short-lived, and Saiki had quickly stepped back to give them both space, but Hayasaka still felt his eyes well up from how Saiki didn't even try to hide the pure relief spread across his face.

Hayasaka: "It's okay. I'm back now."

Saiki: " *Don't make it sound like you went away* ."

Hayasaka: "Haha, that did sound a bit dramatic, didn't it?"

Peering over the other's shoulder, Hayasaka studied the park once more.

Hayasaka: "So then, how long have you been working on your powers for?"

Saiki: " *A long time.* "

Hayasaka: "It definitely shows. Hey, why don't you take a small break?"

Just as Saiki was about to shake his head, Hayasaka moved the hand he had been hiding behind his back the whole time to reveal a cup of coffee jelly. Saiki stared at it for what was almost a second before snagging it for himself, and Hayasaka could only chuckle. They sat on the fountain's edge, basking in the twinkling stars above.

Hayasaka: "I assumed you've made some big advancements in what you're capable of."

Saiki: " *It's been tough, but I've gained more control over some of my powers. My telekinesis and strength have been growing exponentially. I haven't been able to master teleportation over whole* *islands like that one exception during the case, but I have been trying to get myself to at least the other end of one island.* ”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Saiki: “ *I also can’t seem to see anything inside the top five floors of Nesos HQ with clairvoyance, but I can view almost anything else on the islands.* ”

Hayasaka: “I heard you were using it to check on me.”

Saiki: “ *I did, sometimes.* ”

Hayasaka: “I suppose it was rather boring, as I was sitting in a chair most of the time.”

Saiki: “ *It was better than seeing you do something bad* .”

Hayasaka: “...Anything else you can do with your powers?”

Saiki: “ *My levitation has slowly been coming back. I hope I can reach a height that can go to the top of Nesos HQ. As for the rest of my powers, I’m trying to bring them back as soon as possible, just in case they prove useful* .”

Hayasaka: “Ha… You really have been doing quite a lot in such a short amount of time. Are you sure you won’t overwhelm yourself this way?”

Saiki: “ *I’m fine. This is for you and the others. I know if I push too far and become useless, then this will all be for nothing.* ”

Hayasaka: “You calling yourself useless out of all people… It’s rather silly. You’re very incredible, Saiki. You bear such a gift, yet you’re so modest about it.”

Saiki: “ *I can’t be proud when I see it as a curse* .”

Hayasaka: “Then, you’ve worked hard to bring this curse back.”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “What do you plan to do with it?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t know. I just want to kill whoever’s behind all of this* .”

Hayasaka: “I suppose… I do as well, even if I may not be cursed with the powers to do so. But, killing won’t get us answers. We’ve seen that first hand. If we want closure, we’ll need to have a strategy. That’s… rather hard to do on your own, isn’t it?”

Saiki: “...”

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Stepping inside the lobby, Hayasaka felt his stomach grumble lightly.

Hayasaka: (“Getting some fresh air can only do so much when I’m still getting used to eating properly again, it seems. Making up for all the previous days without food is going to be a nuisance. Regardless… a small meal on my own should refill my stomach—and my social battery.”)

As he went to slip into the kitchen in the restaurant, however, he came face-to-face with someone who happened to be walking out at the same time.

Brian: “Oh! Hayasaka. I was wondering where you went.”

Hayasaka: “What’s that?”

Brian: “Just some noodles. It’s practically the only thing I’ve been eating here for dinner. If it works for me then why change it, right? Ha… Haha…”

Hayasaka: “You really do eat like someone on minimum wage, don’t you?”

Brian: “ *You didn’t have to say it out loud* … Wait. If you’re here, then does that mean you were planning to eat, too?”

Hayasaka opened his mouth to speak, but quickly pursed his lips. For some reason, he couldn’t quite let himself admit it. Noticing the heavy expression on his face, Brian smiled.

Brian: “You don’t have to be embarrassed. It’s a good thing. I actually made extra to give to you.”

Hayasaka: “Brian, just because you said you’d be there for me, that doesn’t make you my personal errand boy.”

Brian: “Oh…”

Hayasaka: “...Look, I’m… thankful, really, that you think about me so much. I suppose I’m not very good at accepting that.”

Brian: “Ah, I see. Well, I’m not going to stop thinking about you, alright? Uh—n-not in that way, of course, but…”

Hayasaka: “Yes, I know what you meant.”

Brian: “So, uh, where did you go when you told me that you wanted to ‘run some errands’ on your own?”

Hayasaka: “It was nothing important. I just—...”

A pair of footsteps cut off Hayasaka’s train of thought as he and Brian turned to see that the restaurant had gained some new patrons.

Jesse: “...”

Natsuki: “...”

The air grew tense—and awkward. No one was quite certain on what to say.

Jesse: “...Hey.”

Hayasaka: “Hello. Are you two here for dinner?”

Natsuki: “Pretty much. We were just gonna have—what was it again?”

Jesse: “Pizza rolls. They’re, uh, microwavable. You should try ‘em one day, they’re good.”

Hayasaka: “I see.”

Then, some more arrived, too.

Latte: “...”

Saiki: “...”

Even though the restaurant was now housed with everyone, no one spoke a word to one another. Hayasaka, once a man who appreciated the silence of a crowd, now found it admittedly aggravating.

Hayasaka: (“Then again, it’s not like there isn’t a reason for this. But, still…”)

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “You deserve to say whatever the hell you want, feel whatever the hell you want! I’ve seen what you’re capable of when you’re the most honest with yourself.”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...Hey, Brian. I’d like to go eat in my room. I suppose you’re coming too?”

Brian: “H-Huh? Oh, um, sure.”

Taking one of the boxes of noodles from Brian’s hands, Hayasaka began to make his way out of the restaurant, the other following suit. He saw how Brian glanced back at the group, before speeding to catch back up with him. This time, when they arrived at his room, Hayasaka moved his chair a little further towards the bed where Brian sat.

Hayasaka: “...About your question from before, Brian.”

Brian paused mid slurp, choking down what he had in his mouth.

Brian: “ *Urk* —Y-Yeah?”

Hayasaka: “I went to talk with everyone.”

Brian: “You did? What about?”

Hayasaka: “Just… What they wanted to hear.”

Brian: “You mean ‘needed’, right?”

Hayasaka: “...Maybe.”

Brian: “I don’t think you realise how important your words are to them, Hayasaka. I mean, they have an impact on me, at least.”

Biting his tongue, Hayasaka lingered on his words. Then, he noiselessly went back to eating. Following on from their meals, Hayasaka spied the current time on the clock.

Hayasaka: “It’s getting late.”

Brian: “Um, Hayasaka. Do you just… sleep in that chair now?”

Hayasaka: “I got tired of sulking in my bed.”

Brian: “But… you don’t even have a pillow or anything. You don’t find it uncomfortable?”

Hayasaka: “I’ve gotten used to it. Like most things in my life.”

Brian: “ *Sigh* … I think, maybe, it would be better to rest in your bed tonight, right?”

Hayasaka: “How about you? Does your promise have a curfew?”

Brian: “...I don’t know. I’m sort of unsure if I should leave you alone, even if it’s just for the night.”

Hayasaka: “Me neither. I suppose I don’t care either way.”

Brian: “How cold… Still, I don’t think you’d want me to watch over you while you sleep. Maybe I could… bring in a blanket and take the floor? Although, that would be a bit hypocritical of me…”

Hayasaka: “Just take the bed, Brian.”

Brian: “But we can’t—t-together? I feel like that’s a big boundary we’re suddenly just jumping over here, isn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “It’s only weird if you think too hard about it. I’ve found that most of my previous worries can be solved that way.”

Brian: “I don’t know if that works for all your issues, but… I guess you’re right. And, like I said, I’m going to stay by your side as long as you need it.”

Hayasaka nodded, then trekked towards the bed and slipped off his blazer. Brian was quick to scramble in front of him, pulling back the bedsheet gently.

Once they had both rested themselves in the bed, Hayasaka couldn’t help but notice how Brian continuously tapped his fingers together, or patted around on the bedsheets, or went to re-fluff his pillow. Glancing over at him, he caught his attention with a firm look.

Hayasaka: “Brian, if you don’t like this—”

Brian: “N-No, no, that’s not it. This is, um, just my first time sharing a bed with someone, is all. I’ll get used to it.”

Hayasaka: “I’ll hold you to that. Otherwise, I don’t think I’ll be able to fall asleep if you act so uncomfortable.”

Brian: “H-Haha… Oh, actually, I was wondering if you’ve ever, uh, done this before—the sleeping with someone else part. Well, not ‘with’, but ‘beside’… y-you get what I mean. Did you do it with, you know, um…”

Hayasaka: “Yes, we did, once. It was the night after the fourth trial.”

Hayasaka’s grip on the bedsheet tightened.

Hayasaka: “I wished we did it more. What I’d do for a few more times, no, just one more time before he died. Would that even satisfy me, though? Or, am I just saying it now that I can’t have it?”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “...Haha. Brian, do you know why Kurumada wanted to sleep beside me?”

Brian: “Why’s that…?”

Hayasaka: “Because I told him I tried to kill myself.”

Brian: “Y-You… Hang on. Isn’t that what you said before, in the trial…?”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Saiki… Saiki knocked a knife out of my hands far from where I stood to prevent me from harming myself! That has nothing to do with luck—it was purely impossible!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...It was a hallucination that made me do it. Well, I keep telling myself that. But, who picked up that knife, if not myself? Sometimes I wonder what would’ve happened if Saiki didn’t have such wondrous powers to save me in time—if I wasn’t so lucky to just be some side prop to a hero. Do you think I’d still be here? Do you think Nesos would’ve counted mine and Bojack’s death as a double murder? Or, a double suicide?”

A hand placed itself atop of Hayasaka’s, and he peered over to see Brian give him a soft look, as a means to say such words were no longer necessary. Inhaling a shaky breath, he grabbed hold of his hand, and squeezed it tightly.

Hayasaka: “...Sorry.”

Brian: “You know, sometimes I still wonder what would’ve happened if you and Saiki didn’t save me from Monotora in the vents. Well, I think that’s what happened. I sort of pieced together what I could from what you said in the trial. I also wonder what would’ve happened if you didn’t come to my aid when Kurumada attacked me. We’re… lucky to be here, right?”

Hayasaka: “...But is it right?”

Brian: “Well… I’m happy you’re alive.”

Hayasaka: “...”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “...Why’re you putting up with this? I’m not your ally. I’m not your *friend* . I want Kurumada back. I’d rather you had all died instead of him. Is that enough to get you to realise why you should leave me alone?”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “...You don’t have to say it back to me, if it’s a lie. I’m just telling you how I feel.”

Hayasaka: “...Brian.”

Brian: “Yeah?”

Hayasaka: “Stop talking. I think if I hear another word out of that kind mouth, I might cry.”

Brian nodded. But, he didn’t retract his hand. Hayasaka didn’t mind that. And somehow, just somehow, it was enough to help him fall asleep.

***

When Hayasaka woke up, it was cold. He didn’t feel cold, but something had gone missing. Turning over, he saw the rest of an empty bed. He sat up to collect his glasses, and scanned around the room. A lone tablet sat a ways away on the table, so he got up to check it out. The screen was already loaded on a private DM. Before he could decide whether he wished to snoop or not, he caught sight that this was his own DM chat, and that a few messages had been sent from the tablet to him.

[7:26AM] Brian: I’m leaving this message here when you wake up. Don’t worry abo

[7:28AM] Brian: I sent that early sorry

[7:32AM] Brian: Don’t worry about where I am. I’ve just gone to do something. I’ll find you when I’m done. If you do need me, I’ll be on the third island.

Hayasaka stared at the messages, before setting the tablet back down.

Hayasaka: “You’ve gotten quite used to the tablets now, haven’t you Brian?”

Walking down the stairs to the ground floor, Hayasaka paused on his way towards the restaurant. Straining his ears, he confirmed he wasn’t hearing things: there was a faint chatter coming from the hallway of the sports centre. Creeping closer, he peered down the open doorway.

Moony: “So what is it you wanted to talk to me privately about? And if it’s so private, why do you even want to say it? It won’t be so private anymore once I know what it is, if you know what I mean.”

Natsuki: “...That’s fine. It’s something I need you to know, anyway.”

Hayasaka: (“Natsuki and Moony? Could this be…”)

FLASHBACK

Natsuki: “No… I don’t feel like that’s right.”

Jesse: “Then, why don’t you find the time to go tell her the truth?”

Natsuki: “I… I dunno. It’s just…”

FLASHBACK END

Natsuki: “...I killed Ena.”

Moony: “...What? Are you trying to be the next group comedian? Purple killed Ena, not pinky.”

Natsuki: “No, what you were told… It was a lie. Yuri was the one to plan the murder, but I was the one who carried out the crucial part. I was the one to poison Ena. I baked them a cupcake with a poisonous berry, and they ate it.”

Moony: "..."

Natsuki: "...And I need you to know that, because I couldn't go on if you didn't. It's not right for you to believe a lie on the death of your friend. I'm very sorry for what I did. I wish I could take back what happened, but I can't. So, all I can do is take responsibility for it. It's okay if you don't forgive me—I'm not asking for it. I just… want you to find peace for Ena."

Moony: "..."

Natsuki: "..."

Moony: "...Wow. You sure have the guts to admit to murder. Real guts to admit to murdering Ena."

Natsuki: "..."

Moony: "But, I'd hate to live in a lie. I don't like bein' lied to. So, thanks. I dunno why you did it, but I'm pretty mad at you and purple for it. If I had arms, you'd be out of luck right now."

Hayasaka watched Natsuki smile sadly to herself.

Natsuki: "Yeah, I guess so."

Moony: "...You're weird. Anyway, I'm gonna go find something to eat. All this murder talk makes me hungry."

Hayasaka: ("If anything, you're the weird one if that's what gauges your appetite.")

As he saw Moony float towards the lobby, Hayasaka swiftly stepped away, occupying himself with some brochure display to make it appear he wasn't just eavesdropping a moment ago. Soon, he heard soft footsteps approach, turning slightly to catch sight of Natsuki. She hadn't noticed him, arms crossed tightly against her chest as she trudged past.

Hayasaka: “Natsuki. Good morning.”

Natsuki: “Huh? O-Oh, Hayasaka. Good morning.”

Hayasaka: “You’re not with Jesse. That’s a rare sight to see.”

Natsuki: “Well, you know, we’re not joined at the hip or anything. I can do stuff without him if I want.”

Hayasaka: “Of course you can. I was making a useless comment, really.”

Natsuki: “...”

Hayasaka: “...You look a bit conflicted. Is everything alright?”

Natsuki: “Yeah. I’m just… feeling a little upset when I know I shouldn’t be.”

Hayasaka: “Ah… I’m sorry to hear that. Perhaps you could do something to take your mind off whatever’s bothering you? I was just about to head to the restaurant. Would you like to come with me?”

Natsuki: “Mm… Alright. Actually, do you mind if I bake something for you? It’s something I wanted to do earlier, but I just… didn’t know if I would be invading or not.”

Hayasaka: “Oh? That’s very thoughtful of you, Natsuki. I wouldn’t mind that at all.”

Giving her a smile, Hayasaka felt a relief when Natsuki smiled back to match.

Hayasaka: ("...That's right. You shouldn't feel bad at all about what you did. You're so much braver than I am. Natsuki could've explained herself much further than she did—she didn't even say anything about refusing to push Ena at the clocktower. She didn't add anything to make herself pitied. She handled it… so maturely.")

The two then walked into the restaurant, Natsuki making her way towards the kitchen as Hayasaka scouted out a place to sit. Resting his hand atop a chair, he took regard to the unusual chatter that grew from the other side of the restaurant.

Latte: "That's a lot of cups. Are you having them all for breakfast?"

Saiki: "..."

Latte had pointed towards the dozen or so coffee jelly cups laid out on the table beside Saiki, who continued to munch on a piece of toast.

Saiki: " *...They're snacks for later* ."

Latte: "Ah, I see. Perhaps you could bring some different things, too. Say, some fruit, or other treats."

Saiki shook his head. Latte put her hands on her hips, and smiled.

Latte: "Well, I can't blame you for picking favourites. I can't go a day myself with a latte or two, hehe. Where do you find all of these, anyway?"

Saiki: " *Why do you want to know* ?"

Latte: "I've never had one before. But, if you like them so much, then I want to give it a taste, too."

Saiki: "..."

Latte: “Are you worried that if you tell me, you’ll be competing with me for them? Haha, don’t worry. I only intend to take one.”

Saiki let out a huff—either from the one-sided conversation, or that Latte was spot on. To her surprise, he slid one of the coffee jelly cups on the table towards her.

Saiki: “ *Don’t ask me for another, even if you end up liking it* .”

Latte: “Hehe, then, I’ll just have to savour this one, won’t I?”

Hayasaka hadn’t realised he was smiling through the whole interaction, clearing his throat with some embarrassment.

Hayasaka: (“Latte’s just as rough around the edges with Saiki as I am. Then again, at least she has the experience as a teacher. I just had the advantage of being Saiki’s ideal ‘averageness’.”)

After a pleasant breakfast from Natsuki, Hayasaka decided to take a stroll around the islands.

Hayasaka: (“I might as well stretch my legs a bit. This island is as beautiful as it is vile.”)

His peace had been interrupted just before he could reach the first island’s bridge, stopping in his tracks before he had the opportunity to bump into the speedwalker oncoming opposite.

Jesse: “Oh—damn, uh, sorry ‘bout that.”

Hayasaka: “It’s fine. You appear to be in a rush. Did you lose your lighter again?”

Jesse: “Did I…? Oh, oh, like that one time when I bumped into you, and I was lookin’ for… Haha, yeah, I remember that. Don’t worry—never let it leave me ever since.”

Hayasaka: “What’s that you’re holding?”

Jesse: “Huh?”

Flicking his eyes down to the sheets of paper in his hand, Jesse stashed them behind his back.

Jesse: “S’nothing—just like, random shit. Oh, uh, now that I caught you, you’re not planning to go to the third island, are you?”

Hayasaka: “Well, I might. I’m just going wherever my feet take me.”

Jesse: “Probably not a good idea to go there, man. Something happened—basically there was this accident and stuff.”

Hayasaka: “Huh? But… I’m certain Brian’s there right now. Is he alright?”

Jesse: “Him? Uh, yeah, he’s fine. But, like, you shouldn’t go anyway ‘cuz, you know, you gotta be taking things easy and if you go, it’ll only stress you out. It’s all—we got it all under control, so don’t sweat it.”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Jesse: “If I were you, I’d just go relax on the beach. You like reading, right? Bring a book with you or something. There’s this blue deckchair with a cushion by that big palm tree. I’m just throwin’ out ideas, I guess.”

Despite Jesse’s seemingly rapid and mis-matched suggestions, Hayasaka decided to play along anyway and gave him a nod.

Hayasaka: “Thank you for looking out for me, Jesse. I might take up your suggestion.”

Jesse: “Yeah? That’s great, man. I’ll see you around, alright?”

Jesse then rushed past him. Hayasaka stood still, unsure where to direct his next step.

Hayasaka: (“...No. I’m not going to get involved with something I’m clearly not invited to. I can wonder about it all I want, but it won’t change anything. Actually… *Is* there a deckchair with a cushion?”)

The more he thought upon it, the more Jesse’s idea became rather enticing to him. So, Hayasaka finished off his short-lived walk by stopping by the library to pick up a book, and returned to the beach. Spotting the deckchair in question, he dragged it underneath a tree before sitting down.

He managed to stick it out to chapter two or so of the book before his eyes felt too heavy to follow the words any longer. Before he drifted away with the warmth of the sun, he slipped out his tablet and typed a message out to the usual DM.

[3:02PM] Hayasaka: The beach is warm today. Is that the sort of warmth you said I’ll be able to feel without you? I guess we’ll have to find out which one of us is wrong.

***

???: “...Hayasaka…”

???: “...Um… Hayasaka…”

???: “...”

???: “ *Hayasaka* …!”

Hayasaka: “ *Hah* …!”

Jolting up, Hayasaka narrowed his eyes over at the force that rattled him awake. He had been terribly close to letting out a piece of his mind at the disruption before he recognised the startled person standing over him.

Brian: “Oh gosh, are you alright? I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

Hayasaka: “N…No. I just hadn’t expected to be woken up like that.”

Brian: “You were pretty out of it. I almost didn’t want to wake you, with how peaceful you looked, heheh…”

Hayasaka: “I suppose there’s something you want of me if you did, then.”

Brian: “...Yeah. I’m sorry for leaving you alone for the time being. But, I wanted it to be somewhat of a surprise, so I also couldn’t have you around, er, if that makes sense.”

Hayasaka: “A surprise…?”

Brian gave him a hopeful smile at his comment, holding his hand out.

Brian: “Hayasaka, can you come with me? There’s something I want to show you.”

Taking his hand, Hayasaka let himself be helped up from the deckchair. Brian led him across the islands, until Hayasaka noticed a soft glow of lights in the distance of the third. He glanced over at Brian, who gestured for him to keep walking. Only then when he realised they had approached the shrine, the sight he was met with had him unable to move another step.

The area had been re-hauled to accommodate a fixture of framed drawings surrounded by flowers and scented candles. The aroma of the two swirled together, leaving a pleasant scent drifting about.

As for the drawings, those depicted were familiar. Tender expressions. Gentle smiles. All shining in the candles' gleaming light.

Hayasaka: "Wh… What is this…? Did you make this… Brian…?"

Looking over at the other, Brian shook his head.

Brian: "Ah, well, some of it. But, I couldn't have done it without them."

Hayasaka opened his mouth to question further, but when he turned his head back, he saw that he had missed the others standing in front of the shrine.

Brian: "This… It's something I've wanted to do for a while now. I always found it wrong how this place didn't give anyone time to grieve for those they cared for. The way the victims were cleaned away, and how we were moved along with the new islands and motives… There was just never a time to slow down. So, I wanted to give everyone something, even if it was small. But, as more were lost, the bigger the scope became. I forgot about it, and soon found myself solely focusing on the mysteries. It was only until recently that I realised that *I* had become the one who didn't slow down."

Brian looked out toward the others.

Brian: "So, I tried asking for help. I didn't think anyone would be willing to hear me out, but…"

Natsuki: "...I liked the idea. It wouldn't just help myself—but everyone else, too."

Jesse: "And like, why would I wanna say no to that? So I said, hey, we can throw together some frames for these, too."

Latte: “I thought it would be nice if we set them up here with some flowers that reminded us of them. I know it goes a little out of our way from the hotel, but this place felt right.”

Saiki: “ *I found those candles in the supermarket. I don’t know anything about aromatherapy, so I just chose smells that wouldn’t be too overwhelming* .”

Hayasaka: (“...I see. So, Brian wanted to show the others how he truly felt after what occurred at the restaurant, and in turn, they accepted. It’s… wonderful, to see what they’ve done for each other. But…”)

Hayasaka glanced back at the drawings, eyes locking onto a particular face.

FLASHBACK

Yuri: “Even if we’re all told we can just live on the island without having to kill someone, we’re all being forced to murder one way or another from the motives presented to us so far.”

FLASHBACK

Gin?: “ *You’ve let so many people die. That’s not very fair. They had lives too, you know.* ”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “ *U-Urk...* !”

Latte: “Hayasaka…!”

Hands diving to his throat, Hayasaka folded into himself.

Hayasaka: ("...How unfair. I shouldn't be allowed to look at this. After everything I've done, I shouldn't be standing here. Their faces—so full of life, so full of soul—yet, who was the one who took that away from them…? I have to go… I have to…")

It was then when he felt a presence approach him. Glancing up, he quickly wiped his mouth with a quivering hand.

Saiki: " *If you can't face looking at it right now, then don't.* "

Hayasaka: "Huh…?"

Saiki: " *I haven't been able to look, either. No one's expecting any gratitude. What you take from this is up to you.* "

Hayasaka: "..."

Jesse: "Wait, how have you not seen it? Ain't you the one who drew K— *Ouch* …!"

Natsuki: " *Dummy* …! *Don't say it out loud* ."

Moony: "Why? Is his name cursed or something?"

Latte: "I did notice you were avoiding its sight while setting up the candles."

Saiki: "..."

Latte: "But, Saiki's right. Even if you only ever wish to take a small peek, we don't mind. This is a gift for everyone, after all."

Brian: “Oh god, Hayasaka, I… I probably shouldn’t have just thrown you in blind to this, shouldn’t I? I just thought you’d like—ah, I’m so sorry…”

Hayasaka: “...No, it’s… it’s fine. I think…”

He gazed around at the others, before settling his eyes to the ground.

Hayasaka: “...I want you all to cherish what you’ve made. That’s what I want to take from this.”

Brian: “Hayasaka…”

Jesse: “Hey, man, that’s like, really sweet. But, shit, I can’t get over how I totally botched Bojack’s likeness, heheh. I could practically hear him talking my ear off about it in my head.”

Natsuki: “It doesn’t look that bad, you know? You’re really good at drawing. Why’d you never tell me that?”

Jesse: “Hey, can’t let ‘em know all my talents upfront. How about you?”

Natsuki: “I sorta just end up drawing in the style of whatever the last manga I read was. I hope Yuri doesn’t mind that…”

Moony: “What about mine, huh? Ena’s never looked better! Although, they kind of look like they belonged on paper, anyway…”

Latte: “Hehe, I’m glad we have a few talented artists with us. Unfortunately I don’t think my portraits did much justice…”

Brian: “I think they look great—I mean, you definitely put a lot of care into Mai’s. I was a little worried we wouldn’t be finished in time with how long you were working on her picture.”

Saiki: “ *You were so focused you ended up ignoring us a few times* .”

Latte: “Really? I hadn’t realised that… Haha, I suppose I didn’t want to say I was finished until it looked just like how I remembered her.”

As the others continued to chat about their experiences while creating their drawings, Hayasaka took a few deep breaths to calm himself. Saiki offered him a seat on a nearby bench, and everyone followed suit in sitting around together.

The time passed with stories, jokes, and a few songs—anything that would remind them of the ones they missed the most. This time was theirs, and only theirs. Their memories, and their love.

Hayasaka found he had become more relaxed by listening to the others. It was like all those days confined to his room had been mere moments between then and now. Although a heaviness continued to carve into his core, the bright words spoken by his friends seemed to envelope that pain, even if only for a brief moment.

He had to admit to himself: it wasn't bad—not at all.

In fact, he was so caught up in it all that he hadn't noticed he'd been handed one of the frames from the fixture.

Brian: "Here. Maybe you can't face them all just yet. But, I'm sure you'd like to see him, right?"

Hayasaka: "..."

Tracing his finger down the side of the frame, Hayasaka tilted his head as he studied the portrait. The mess of hair, the fiery eyes, the toothy grin. His fingers curled tightly over the frame.

Brian: "...I drew this one. I kept thinking about whether or not you'd like how I expressed him as I worked on it. Still, if it feels better to criticise it, then I won't stop you."

Hayasaka: "...You drew this? You were able to draw someone that tried to kill you?"

Brian: "No. I drew someone that loved you."

Hayasaka: "..."

Brian: "There's a lot of sides to people, I think. I just ended up being on the wrong side. But, how you saw him is more important to me than how he saw me."

Hayasaka: “If it’s worth anything, I believe I’ve hated you more than he ever did.”

Brian: “...”

Hayasaka: “...Thank you, Brian. That’s what I meant to say.”

Brian: “No, I think… What you said before was enough for me.”

Hayasaka nodded at the other, before letting his eyes wander back to the drawing. Nighttime soon drew their memorial to a close, and everyone decided it would be best to head back to the hotel. Reaching his room, Hayasaka turned to the other still beside him.

Hayasaka: “I suppose you’re going to accompany me again.”

Brian: “That’s our plan, isn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “If one thing is to stay consistent.”

Brian: “I’m going to assume that’s a positive statement? Yeah.”

As Brian awkwardly glanced elsewhere, he locked eyes with someone else a few ways away.

Saiki: “...”

Brian: “...What’re you looking at me like that for?”

Hayasaka: “Don’t worry, Saiki. He’s not forcing his company on me.”

Saiki: “ *I know. I saw you two last night* .”

Brian: “Y-You did? But— *Oh* . Clairvoyance, that’s right…”

Hayasaka: “You’re still watching over me?”

Saiki: “ *...I just want to be certain about your safety* .”

Hayasaka: “I see…”

Brian: “With what I said before at the restaurant, I understand if any of that applies to me. But, I want you to know that I made a promise to always be there for Hayasaka. Even if you don’t trust me on that, I’ll keep on going until you do. That goes for everyone else, too—the memorial was just one of many things that I want to give.”

Saiki: “...”

???: “ *Oof* …!”

???: “Shit! Sorry ‘bout that.”

???: “Hey, watch it, Jesse…!”

Overhearing a new commotion, the three turned to see Jesse and Natsuki carrying a stack of blankets and pillows, and apologising to Latte.

Latte: “Don’t fret about it. I could’ve been bumped into with something much less soft, after all. Although, why are you two carrying around such things?”

Natsuki: “We were just taking some spare blankets and stuff to my room.”

Jesse: “I saw Nat wasn’t looking too hot this morning, so I suggested we could have a slumber party—pillow forts n’ all.”

Natsuki: “I never really asked for any pillow forts, you know. But… Yeah, I feel like doing something to get my mind off some stuff, that’s all.”

Hayasaka: (“Ah, she must be referring to this morning, when she told Moony about the truth…”)

Latte: “Aw, that sounds like fun! I could make some snacks for you two, if you’d like.”

Natsuki: “If you offer something like that, then it would be rude not to invite you as well…”

Natsuki then caught sight of the three looking her way down the hall.

Natsuki: “Jeeze, if you’re all gonna look at me like that, then everyone might as well come!”

Brian: “S-Sorry?”

Latte: “But a sleepover all together sounds wonderful, doesn’t it?”

Jesse: “Yeah, then we can have a total pillow war…!”

Saiki: “ *Now you’ve just made it sound violent…* ”

Hayasaka: “I suppose… I wouldn’t mind that.”

Brian: “Ah… Well, wherever you go, I’ll go too.”

Hayasaka: “How about you, Saiki? I wouldn’t blame you if you’d prefer a peaceful night.”

Saiki: “ *...No. I’ll come* .”

Natsuki: “If everyone wants to come, then I don’t think we should use my room anymore. It’s way too messy.”

Latte: “I don’t mind if we use my room. I think it should be clean enough.”

Moony: “And it’s suuuper cosy in there. It smells like a tea party, but without the tea or the party.”

Hayasaka: (“So what does that leave, exactly…?”)

Picking up a few extra blankets and what-not, everyone chipped in to turn Latte’s hotel room into a large sleeping area for the six to share. While idly fluffing a pillow, Hayasaka noticed Saiki a few ways away, listening in on some of the others.

Latte: “What’s that you’re reading, Natsuki?”

Natsuki: “This manga series I found in the arcade. I’ve been reading it ever since we were given access to the fourth island, but there’s just one volume that I can’t find.”

Jesse: “Yeah, it’s a damn shame. We tried lookin’ for it, and even after turning the arcade upside down we still couldn’t find it anywhere.”

Natsuki: “I know it might sound like I’m complaining about nothing compared to our bigger problems, but I’d really like to finish this series. It meant a lot to me to be able to just… do something normal for a little bit, you know?”

Saiki: "..."

Jesse: "Hey, what if we made up the rest of the story or somethin'? Clearly the villain's gonna get their shit wrecked."

Latte: "Oh, but wouldn't it be nice if the hero and villain teamed up to fight something even greater?"

Natsuki: "I mean, yeah, but…"

Saiki: " *Hey* ."

Natsuki: "Huh?"

Saiki put a finger to his temple, and before a second could pass, a book appeared on his other hand. He then held it out to Natsuki, who's eyes widened as she read the cover.

Natsuki: "This is… the final volume…! How did you find it?"

Saiki: " *I saw it wasn't in the arcade. After checking a few other places, it turns out it was a prize from the machine in the lobby* ."

Jesse: "What the hell? That's a total con, yo."

Natsuki: "But, why did you do that, Saiki? I didn't ask you to."

Saiki: " *I know. I was just sticking to what I said I'd do: use my powers to help you all* ."

Jesse: "But I thought that usin' your powers ain't so easy right now."

Saiki: "*I don't care. I'm going to keep doing what I said*."

Latte: "Ah, I see. It must be about that, right?"

FLASHBACK

Jesse: "It's not about that! Why would I wanna fight alongside someone who I can't trust not to exploit my regrets—and the regrets of my friend—and use them for his own gain?"

Saiki: "*And why would I want to fight alongside someone who can't see what I've had to sacrifice of my own identity just to do the right thing*?"

FLASHBACK END

Saiki: "..."

Natsuki: "Oh…"

Natsuki glanced down at the manga.

Natsuki: "...Thank you, Saiki."

Jesse: "Yeah, man. You're tryna make up for it, and I respect that. I guess I didn't think too hard about it from your side, if I gotta be honest."

Natsuki: "Same here. I mean, you did thank us for helping you figure out you weren't the one who killed L. It's just that your words kinda hurt us, too."

Saiki: “ *Look, for the record… You two aren’t as annoying as I made you out to be in the trial. Watching you two, it reminds me of* …”

FLASHBACK

Kaidou: “I won’t let you down, okay? That’s a promise.”

FLASHBACK END

Saiki: “ *...Someone else.* ”

Latte: “Saiki…”

Natsuki: “Hey, Saiki. Do you like manga? I can let you read some of this series, if you want.”

Saiki: “ *It’s fine. The cover makes it look cheesy enough anyway* .”

Natsuki: “What—?! I was trying to be nice, you know?”

Saiki: “ *So I’m not allowed to refuse* ?”

Jesse: “I dunno, man. You wouldn’t like to see her when she’s mad.”

Natsuki: “Now what does *that* mean?”

Jesse and Latte chuckled as Natsuki shook her head with a huff to cover up her own giggle. Saiki simply stared on as he did, but Hayasaka could see a faint glint of content in his eyes.

It wasn’t long until the chatter had died down, and everyone had begun to lie around the blankets. Hayasaka had felt a little warmer beside Brian last night compared to on his own, but now alongside everyone else, that warmth had only grown stronger.

Hayasaka: ("Because I love them too, I have nothing to worry about, do I…? Perhaps you win this one, Kurumada.")

***

Today was the first day in a while where Hayasaka did not wake up on his own. In fact, he continued to stay surrounded by the others all morning. Natsuki and Jesse were finally back in the kitchen together, preparing a big breakfast that they claimed was to be their best bake yet. When Latte offered to make the drinks, Hayasaka was pleasantly surprised to see she had brought out a teapot of black soybean tea instead of her trademark brew. Even Saiki, someone who'd always sit somewhere in the far back of the restaurant, opted to join them all across a large table.

It was only then when a soft chuckle brought him to turn to Brian by his side.

Brian: "Oh, sorry."

Hayasaka: "What?"

Brian: "It's just… Well, it's been a while since I've seen you smile like that."

Hayasaka fell quiet, hovering a hand over his lips. How odd.

As their breakfast came to a close, Hayasaka went to return his plate to the kitchen. The others assured him that they could handle the washing up, leaving his hands empty on what to do.

Brian: "You look a little bored."

Hayasaka: "I suppose I didn't think I'd still be here to have to make a plan."

Brian: "Well… I have something. How about we go to the factory?"

Hayasaka: “The factory? Why there?”

Brian: “I’ve been a little curious to check it out. Ever since Moony told us that Monotora liked to watch over it during nighttime, it makes me wonder if we missed something inside. Not to mention how they lashed out in the trial about it…”

FLASHBACK

Monotora: “Will you move on from that already?! You’ve got other things to be talkin’ about, don’t ya?!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “Oh, right. I was just wondering why you’d want to go somewhere so far from here, really.”

Brian: “S-So that’s what you were more concerned with…”

Hayasaka: “Still, I don’t mind following along. Sitting around won’t do me any good.”

Brian: “That’s the spirit.”

Arriving at the factory, Hayasaka parked himself by a wall as he watched Brian search around. Nothing had seemed to change from the last time he was here, but he made no move to double-check. That nosey spark that was once a driving force had been snuffed out; for once, he’d let someone else have the detective fun.

Hayasaka: (“So, this must be what it was like for those who weren't at the forefront of the murder investigations. I have to say, why did I never think to do this myself?”)

Brian: “Hayasaka, over here. I want to check out this room.”

Brian called out from across the hall, and Hayasaka pushed himself off the wall to walk over. When Brian opened the door, however, the overwhelming scent of rot and blood made him hold a hand over his nose.

Hayasaka: “ *Jesus* .”

Brian: “...Yeah. Phew, uh… If you want to stay out here, then…”

Hayasaka: “I’m used to the horror by now. Let’s just go in.”

Somehow, this room seemed to be larger on the inside than the rest of the facility. They passed by tall trees and bushes, coaxed with a sticky humid air that entrapped more of that rotting smell they caught from the door. Before long, a cage had come into view: yet it was more meat than metal. Scraps of old flesh hanged from the wiring, and thick clots of blood dirtied the inside.

Brian: “This place… It’s like a jungle. I think this is where Monotora must have been kept at one point, huh?”

Hayasaka: “So, Nesos made a deadly zoo enclosure. I wonder what made them think a random office block was a better fit for the tiger over all of this.”

Brian: “I don’t know… But, since Monotora’s current room is on the 9th floor of their headquarters, it feels like Nesos wanted to be able to monitor them much closer.”

Hayasaka: “Whatever it is, I don’t really care. I just don’t want to be around this filth anymore.”

Brian: “You know what? Me too.”

Leaving the enclosure, the duo moved further down the hall until they came across another door. Brian went to try the handle, only to find it locked.

Brian: “Hm, I wonder if there’s a key around here…”

Hayasaka idly stared on at the door, recalling a distant memory.

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “Argh—screw it! I’m gonna break this fuckin’ door down myself!”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: (“That was when we found the database was locked…”)

A few beats passed before Hayasaka stepped up to the door.

Brian: “Hayasaka…?”

With a second delay, Hayasaka threw his body against the door, his shoulder taking most of the blow. The lock barely rattled, so he did it once more. Brian held his hand out dumbfoundedly.

Brian: “W-What are you doing…?!”

Hayasaka: “I’m going to— *hah* ! Break down the door…!”

Brian: “Break down the–? Hayasaka, you can’t be serious, can you? You’re only going to hurt yourself by doing that!”

Hayasaka: “I’ll be fine…! I just need to— *Gah* …!”

The door had unexpectedly opened on his next ram, causing him to tumble over into the open room.

???: “ *Stop trying to be so heroic. Your body can’t change overnight.* ”

Pulling himself onto his knees, Hayasaka turned around to see a familiar face walking towards them.

Hayasaka: “Saiki… So, you were the one to open the door.”

Saiki held his hand out to help him up.

Hayasaka: “Now I feel embarrassed. I don’t know why I thought that was going to work. S-Sorry…”

Brian: “But, Saiki, how did you know we were here?”

Saiki: “ *I wanted to know where you two were going after breakfast* .”

Brian: “Oh, I see! You must’ve used clairvoyance to see where we went.”

Saiki: “ *No, I just followed you two here.* ”

Brian: “O-Oh…”

The three then went inside to explore the newly opened office. It appeared just as run-down as the other rooms, with the addition of blueprints scattered about. Peering over one, Hayasaka saw the innards of Monotora, and wished he had never looked at all.

Brian: “This office must belong to the head engineer of Monotora. It makes me wonder why anyone would ever agree to build something like them in the first place…”

Saiki: “...”

Hayasaka: “What’s that, Saiki?”

Saiki: “ *A letter. I found it on the desk* .”

Brian: “What does it say?”

‘Hello to whoever has found this letter,

The name’s Guy, short for Macgyver, at this point in time I am likely dead. But I have reasons behind writing this letter.

I am the creator of Monotora, and the cause of hundreds of innocent people who will die in the claws of a horrible creation I had made with no choice. And I will forever regret ever working with a company so twisted with power to create a horrible killing game.

I could only do so much, but I hope this letter will at least give people here a fighting chance to survive against Monotora, even if it keeps them alive just a little longer.

During my time with Monotora, I’ve quietly kept note of their little gimmicks. And maybe this’ll give people feeling somewhat hopeful to stand off against the mech.

- *Eye contact is important, they’re able to track your smallest movements, their AI is cleverly constructed to go after blindspots.*
- *Sticking to large groups of people will discourage them from recklessly attacking you all at once, and never scatter.*
- *Stay out of the dark; they love to ambush in dark areas, and they’re real good with that. Always stay in lighted areas and with one or more people.*

- *Watch your surroundings, even in the trees. They're capable of climbing and silently sneaking around much like snakes do.*
- *Avoid their tail as it's a constrictor, the strength of their tail is as strong as an anaconda's. Efficient in lifting multiple bodies into trees.*

In regards to their venom, it contains substances including cyanide and a small percentage of venom collected from king cobras. The beginning stages often start with waves of nausea, and moments of vomiting. However, if a victim has been left with the venom in their system for too long, they will begin to experience psychological effects, they may be more reckless and not know right from wrong. Snake venom will leave them in a weakened state with drowsiness on the side, leaving the victim to be in a vulnerable position.

I'd like to mention as well, their body is layered with a synthetic material that functions just like our flesh, that layer of skin is highly durable, able to tolerate physical hits, and tanks a lot of sharp weapons such as axes or knives.The wounds they receive can eventually recover but isn't efficient in regenerating - they always remain as scars. It can handle gun bullets for some time before its skin begins to tear. I have included other malfunctions:

- *Fire is another weakness, their skin can't tolerate incineration for a certain amount of time. I do not know how long they will function while on fire however as that wasn't tested.*
- *Typically like their living domestic counterparts, they're not a fan of deep bodies of water that requires them to submerge themselves fully under. They are likely aware their mechanical body will not handle water intake if it gets into their mouth.*
- *Sudden bright lights/flashing lights are a sensitivity of theirs, it tends to stun them as it has a moment to recalibrate its system.*
- *The riskiest option - Liquids, especially those that contain alcohol. Their artificial stomach can't process liquids like they can with meat, the reaction leads to them violently vomiting and glitching… the unfortunate side effect leads them with higher levels of aggression. Ideally this would be a last minute action to stun them but the second half wouldn't be so great to deal with.*

One last thing that's important to note, I've requested my colleagues to leave a container of antidotes in a hotel room that one of you will be placed in. With the little time I've gotten to write this, they should be able to create enough doses for a few people. Make sure to keep these out of sight from the cameras, and use them wisely.

Good luck.'

Brian: "...Well, it could've been nice to know a few of those things beforehand, huh?"

Saiki: “ *It looks like even the guy who made the thing regretted it in the end* .”

Hayasaka: “...Monotora’s bite, huh? Like the one he… *Urk* …”

Brian: “Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka: “...I’m alright. It doesn’t matter in the end now that he’s already dead.”

Brian’s gaze lingered on the other, before he took the letter and slipped it into his briefcase.

Brian: “I’ll keep this on me. You never know when it could come in handy. In fact, let me just…”

Picking up a few more sheets lying around, Brian stuffed them inside his briefcase too.

Saiki: “ *What are you doing? You can’t expect to haul everything in that tiny briefcase* .”

Brian: “I-I know, but I want to hold onto as much evidence as I can.”

Saiki: “ *For what? You’re not still trying to solve Nesos’ mysteries, are you* ?”

Brian: “I’m not asking you to help me. It’s just… something I want to see through to the end.”

Saiki: “ *Even so, what good will come of it* ?”

Brian: “W-Well…”

Hayasaka: "...He'd probably be a lot more prepared with all that information on his side."

Saiki: "..."

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: "What do you plan to do with it?"

Saiki: " *I don't know. I just want to kill whoever's behind all of this* ."

Hayasaka: "I suppose… I do as well, even if I may not be cursed with the powers to do so. But, killing won't get us answers. We've seen that first hand. If we want closure, we'll need to have a strategy. That's… rather hard to do on your own, isn't it?"

FLASHBACK END

Brian: "It's fine, really. I'll just make-do with this, and— *hey* …!"

Brian jumped back as stacks of papers were lifted into the air.

Saiki: " *Here. I can move these faster than you* ."

Brian: "H-Huh?! Hang on, how much are you going to take…?!"

Hayasaka sighed softly at the two's antics. A heavy feeling then rose in his chest.

Hayasaka: ("It's not like I care what they do with it. After all, I don't want to learn anything else. Just being here is enough for me. Even if it's only for a little longer, I finally want to enjoy this peace—")

???: (“Hello, everyone!”)

Hayasaka: “H– *Haah* …?!”

Five minutes had hardly passed before Hayasaka found himself stumbling down onto the ground once more. He crashed into a desk behind him, paper flying around his trembling frame.

Brian: “Hayasaka…!”

Brian was quick to jump down beside him.

Brian: “You really need to stop getting hurt today, haha… Huh? W-What’s wrong…?”

Hayasaka: (“It’s happened again—a voice in my head out of nowhere. For the love of god, Saiki, did you really have to scare me like tha…”)

But as Hayasaka went to peer up at the other, he faltered. Saiki’s expression seemed to only mirror his own—he was just as lost as he was.

Hayasaka: (“Saiki… Did he hear the voice as well? Is this not his doing? Then again, the voice did sound rather distorted. Yet, the idea would just be absurd. After all, who else could be capable of such a thing?”)

Brian: “Hayasaka…?”

Hayasaka felt Brian’s hand plant itself on his shoulder, pulling him out of his thoughts.

Hayasaka: “H-Huh? Ah, I just thought… I heard a strange voice. Did you not hear it too…?”

Brian: “A voice? Well, I don’t think I—”

???: (“Ah! So sorry! We didn’t mean to scare you, hehe~…”)

Brian: “... *OkaynevermindsoIwasn’tgoingcrazythen* .”

Hayasaka: “So you did…” (“But then, if those two can hear this voice as well, then does that mean everyone can hear it? And, *how* ?”)

???: (“Don’t worry—I promise you’re not going crazy right now. Let us explain, okay? I’m sure you all remember how Nesos implanted that hallucination program into your heads after you put on those VR headsets. Well, we’ve managed to hack into that program so we can communicate with you all directly, without Nesos being able to detect us!”)

Hayasaka: (“This person—no, people? Whoever it is, they’re using the hallucination program right now to talk to us?”)

???: (“Ah, it’s alright if you’re still confused, but we want to make something clear: we are not your enemy. We’re more like… a new ally. Like you guys, we have been abused by this company that feeds off its own hypocrisy. We know what you all have suffered through in this disgusting excuse of a game, and we want nothing more than to end this—and to help you escape this living hell.”)

Brian: “Ah…”

Hayasaka: (“Is this… What is this? Is this… some sort of salvation? No, I don’t even know if this is real. This could be another trick by Nesos: a new motive, or just another way to toy around with us. Yet, even if it is possible that there are people who know we’re here, and are willing to help us…”)

???: (“We know it won’t be easy for you to be able to trust someone out of the blue like this, especially after being lied to for so long. But, we want to show you that we’re here for you, and no one else. Sadly, we can’t come and meet you from where we are, but we’d like to continue this when you’re all in one place. So, please, go to Nesos Park. We’ll let you know everything there.”)

Hayasaka: ("...The voice is gone. So, they're waiting for us, are they…?")

Brian: "...We should go."

Hayasaka: "Huh…?"

Brian: "You might not understand, but I trust this voice. Something about it feels genuine. They've said everything I've always wanted to be able to. So, I want you to trust them too."

Hayasaka: "..."

Saiki: " *...I don't know if I trust them. But, it's better to take the risk. If it's just Nesos, we at least know they're still in contact with us. Either way, we'll gain something from this* ."

Hayasaka: ("That's right. At this point, it would just be unwise to hide away, when we don't have much left. Yet…")

FLASHBACK

Yuri: "No, it's just a lie, plain and simple. A lie to lead us into a false sense of security, one where we believe we have free control over our actions. Their goal is to make everyone suffer."

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: ("...The more I learn, the more it'll all come back to bite me, won't it?")

Brian: "Hey, Hayasaka. Whatever happens, I'll be alright with whatever you choose to do."

Hayasaka: "Ah…?"

Brian: “If you’re scared, then you can run away. You can take a moment to get yourself back together, so you can come back and face it when you’re more prepared.”

Saiki: “ *I was unsure about where you were going with that at first.* ”

Brian: “I-I’m not that bad at encouragement, am I?”

Hayasaka: “...No, that’s… I didn’t really think of that before. In any case, I should at least hear them out, right?”

Brian gave him a smile, and Hayasaka felt the knot in his chest loosen a little. The three then made their way over to Nesos Park, where they found the others waiting around.

Jesse: “Hey, there they are! So we really did all hear that voice, huh? Do you guys think it’s legit?”

Natsuki: “I’m not going to believe what they’ve said so easily. They are claiming to want the exact opposite of what Nesos wants for us, after all. But… I am willing to hear them out.”

Latte: “I do feel like this company has quite an ego not to insult themselves so harshly like that.”

Brian: “And apart from L, they’ve never re-used any materials from a motive before, either. They always like to boast about their technology and budget, so recycling something like this doesn’t feel in-character for Nesos.”

Hayasaka: “So, it’s a coin flip towards whether or not they’ve just become lazy.”

Brian: “I guess that’s one way of putting it…”

Moony: “Hey, what’s everyone yapping on about anyway? Why’re you all talking about some voice? Are we converting to a new cult or something?”

Brian: “Oh, that’s right. Moony wasn’t with us when we tested out the VR headsets, so she can’t hear the voice.”

Latte: “Don’t worry, Moony. We’ll fill you in on the important details later.”

Saiki: “ *I don’t think she would understand even if you told her* .”

Jesse: “Still, now what? We’re all here, but I haven’t heard nothin’ back from these guys. Talk about ghostin’.”

Brian: “From what they said, it sounded like they’d know when we arrived. That might mean they have access to the cameras.”

Natsuki: “Hang on, but Nesos can also see us from the cameras, right? If this isn’t their doing, don’t you think they're gonna be suspicious about us all coming here?”

Jesse: “Hey, let’s just pretend we’re doing something else. Do you think they’d ignore us if I flipped off that camera over there?”

Saiki: “ *That would be typical behaviour coming from you* .”

???: (“Ah, you all made it! I’m so glad…!”)

Hayasaka: “Ah, they’re back…”

???: (“We can see you guys look a little worried about gathering here. Is it because you think Nesos might find it strange? Don’t worry about that, okay? Nesos aren’t paying much attention to you guys anymore. We’re using this opportunity wisely to reach out to you while we can.”)

Hayasaka: ("I see. That did seem to be the case. It's been an entire week without a word from Nesos. No motives, no Monotora… At first, I didn't care—in fact, I hardly paid attention to it at all. But, now that I wonder about it…")

Natsuki: "I seriously don't get that, though. Why aren't Nesos doing anything to continue the death game?"

Latte: "Perhaps they have nothing more they can do with us, since all the islands have been unlocked?"

Brian: "Hm, I don't think so. Remember what Monotora said before?"

FLASHBACK

Monotora: "Congratulations! You unlocked the last island on Island Nesos! Give yourselves a big pat on the back for somehow livin' long enough to see it all! 'Course, this doesn't mean the killings won't stop. They'll just keep on comin', and comin'! It's in your nature—don't ya feel it? Kehehehe!"

FLASHBACK END

Brian: "They made it sound like the death game was meant to continue even when we were given access to all of the islands."

Jesse: "D'ya think they're tryn'a scrape together some sorta last minute reward for us?"

Saiki: " *It's already been a full week. Something like that at this point is terribly overdue* ."

???: ("The question on your minds right now is what Nesos is doing if they've been ignoring you all for some time, is that right? It may not seem like it to you guys, but Nesos is frustrated. Internally, they've come to a problem in their plan.")

Brian: “A problem in their plan…?”

Natsuki: “I don’t understand. There’s nothing threatening them right now. It’s not like we’ve done anything.”

Jesse: “Yeah, not to mention we found out L’s bomb threat was fake too.”

???: (“We don’t have all the answers ourselves, but we recently found out a potential reason for Nesos’ current behaviour—that being the fifth case. As it turns out, Nesos never wanted to go through with it at all.”)

Hayasaka felt his heart rate spike.

Hayasaka: “They… *They what* …?”

Brian: “But… That can’t be right. What–What does that even mean? Nesos themselves had a big role in that case. They were the ones to send out Kurumada to kill L, didn’t they?”

Natsuki: “And if they didn’t want to go through with it, then what was the point of doing it in the first place…?!”

Hayasaka: (“No… This… This isn’t… right…”)

???: (“We know hearing something like that won’t be easy to accept, but we have to let you know the truth. So that’s why you guys can’t give up.”)

Latte: “Can’t give up? Are you saying… We can do something with that information?”

Jesse: “Even if you say, hey, go over the case again, ain’t it already over? I mean, the storage room’s ‘prolly been cleaned up by now, and Kurumada’s already…”

Hayasaka: “...”

Jesse: “Shit, uh, sorry, Mr. Hayasaka. I didn’t mean to...”

Hayasaka: “...That can’t be all of what you came to tell us, is it?”

Saiki: “ *No. This is our strategy to end the death game.* ”

Natsuki: “Huh? You mean… We can use this fact to confront Nesos?”

Saiki: “ *I don’t know. But, that’s what you’re thinking too, that this is our gateway to stopping this. Right, Hayasaka* ?”

Hayasaka: (“Am I…?”)

???: (“Ah, listen here—this doesn’t end there. We have something else we can give you too. You were never meant to be given access to the top five floors of Nesos HQ, but we’ve managed to unlock them for you guys. There’s a lot of stuff you may find of interest to help you out. Please, however you do it, look as hard as you can. Find as much as you need. You’ll find scary things, pleasant things, confusing things—but you need to look to learn the truth, right?”)

Latte: “Oh my…! They did all that just for us?”

Brian: “That’s… incredible.”

Jesse: “Man, these guys are the real MVPs! Who even are they? Actually, how many of ‘em are there? To unlock and hack all this shit, I’m bettin’ on at least twenty or so.”

Saiki: “ *Hey. What do we do once we investigate? Do you have somewhere we can go next?* ”

Natsuki: “Saiki has a point. What’re we meant to do once we’ve looked around? Do we… Have to find the CEO or something?”

Hayasaka: (“The CEO…”)

FLASHBACK

Kurumada: “That’s where I was brought to… the self-proclaimed CEO of Nesos.”

Jesse: “CEO? You mean like, the mastermind?”

Brian: “You know the person controlling Nesos? Who is it?”

Kurumada: “...”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “...”

???: (“You’re asking what you should do after you investigate, right? Ah, here comes the most important part. You’re going to force Nesos into taking a re-trial with you all. We gained access to the trial grounds, so we can unlock that for you all when you’re ready to confront Nesos. There, you’ll do what you’ve done these past five trials—solve the mystery together. When you do, Nesos won’t have a leg to stand on anymore. And then, you’ll figure out how to stop them.”)

Latte: “That’s awfully vague, isn’t it? But, I think I understand. When we’ve solved all the mysteries, we’ll be more aware of Nesos’ weakness.”

Saiki: “ *That’s good enough for me. We have our plan now* .”

Jesse: “Whoa, wait, already?”

Saiki: “ *As long as these people aren’t lying to us, we have what we need.* ”

Jesse: “No, I get that, man. But, *what we need* is a whole lotta shit, y’know? You’re telling me we gotta investigate five whole floors, *and* remember everything else we’ve learned about Nesos?”

Brian: “Not to mention, the fifth case too…”

Natsuki: “I guess when you put it all into perspective like that, it does sound kinda scary. What if we mess up somewhere?”

Latte: “This isn’t something we can hope for the best with, unfortunately. We have only one shot at this, so we’ll have to make it count.”

???: (“Ah, don’t look so worried! There’s nothing to be afraid of, I promise! We have faith you’ll be able to accomplish your goals, as long as you remember stick together, don’t you think?”)

Brian: “Stick together…?”

At that, the group looked around at one another. So caught up in their woes, they realised just how close they were standing to one another. But, it wasn’t just now: at the shrine yesterday, and during their sleepover, they had slowly merged back into one. Despite losing so many. Despite feeling lethargic enough to give up on it all. Despite the sore urges of hatred towards whoever for whatever reason.

They were all back here together once more. And for some reason, it felt good.

Well, that’s what one wished it could feel like.

Hayasaka: (“Who are these people to come out of nowhere to aid us? It feels like some sort of last-minute miracle. Would we have been able to do so much as wish for this sudden advancement without them? Of course not.”)

Natsuki: “I… It’s true. I don’t want to look scared, or feel scared, when you’re all here with me. So–So I’m gonna hide my fear with rage! I‘m gonna take down Nesos! I’m gonna run over to Nesos HQ right freaking now!”

Jesse: “Yeah, you said it, Nat! Fuckin’ YOLO, ain’t it? And we’re gonna make it by fighting our way out against those jackasses!”

Latte: “We can do it when we’re together! For everyone who’s fought for us by giving up their lives, we’ll fight back for *them…* !”

Moony: “I dunno what you’re all mad-libbin’ about, but this energy rocks!! Pun not intended!!”

Saiki: “ *There isn’t going to be another opportunity like this. I’m going to do whatever I can to destroy Nesos with everything I have* .”

Hayasaka: (“Those words that have managed to hold onto everyone’s hearts… How empty they make me feel. They want to help us? They can’t be serious. They think telling us—telling me—that the trial was all a mistake is going to help us? That it could’ve been *prevented* ? Right to my face? Right to my *goddamn face* ?”)

Brian: “...”

???: (“Ah, it’s so good to see everyone in high spirits! This will be your one final battle against Nesos, so please, do all you can to move forward—”)

Hayasaka: “ *No* …! Give it a rest already, for god’s sake! I don’t want to solve any more ridiculous mysteries! It’s just lies upon lies—and for what? To make me face a truth that’ll only ever hurt? Why? Why does this never end…?!”

Turning sharply on his heel, Hayasaka began to storm away from the park, from the others, from everything.

???: ("*... Coward* .")

Hayasaka: "...!!"

He had thought he had already reached his breaking point. Yet, the insult whispered by nothing more than a faint voice pricked at him hard, like a parasite feeding off his rotting body. There was nothing left to take, so why did it only make him angrier?

Clenching his teeth, he ran.

Brian: "Hayasaka…!"

Brian shot his hand out, but the other was leaving his sight in a blur. Before he could chase after him, he was stopped by an arm lifted in his way.

Saiki: "..."

Brian: "Saiki, please…! Let me go after him!"

Saiki: " *You're the one who told him to run, didn't you* ?"

Brian: "T-That…"

Saiki: " *I'll deal with this. I don't want you putting any more things in his head* —"

Brian: "No! I promised to be by his side! I'm not going to sit back just because you don't trust me! I need to do what's right!"

At that, Brian pushed Saiki out of his way, dashing out of the park. Saiki glanced down at his arm.

Latte: “Saiki…?”

Saiki: “ *...Good grief. It’s about time he grew some backbone* .”

…

Hayasaka continued to flee, but he hadn’t figured out where he was going. Just anywhere that wasn’t where that voice could find him. But that would be ironic—after all, it was all in his head, wasn’t it?

Reaching the hotel, he flew through the doors, tripping and collapsing onto his knees in the lobby. All his energy had been depleted, so he sat there, panting and heaving and clawing at the rough carpet below him. Anger overtook fatigue which overtook pain: a cycle that continued to make his heart race even faster.

Brian: “Hayasaka…”

Hayasaka shot his head up to see Brian kneeling down to his level. He wasn’t quite sure when he had arrived, nor if it mattered.

Hayasaka: “Leave me alone.”

Brian: “Are you sure that’s what you want?”

Hayasaka: “...”

Brian: “...I’m sorry. I’m sure all of this is making it harder for you to decide what you really want, isn’t it?”

Hayasaka: “I’m trapped here, aren’t I?”

Brian: “Trapped?”

Hayasaka: “In my own personal hell. I don’t do anything. Someone dies. I do something. Someone dies. She was right. Everytime I think I can break the cycle, it just holds me tighter in its shackles.”

Brian: “She? Hayasaka, what’re you talking about?”

Hayasaka: “This death game is a never-ending cycle. We were doomed from the start. Even if I die, someone will be hurt from it. That’s why I can’t decide for myself. Because every choice is wrong. I don’t want to investigate. I don’t want to do anything. Brian, what do I do? What the hell do I do…?”

Hands shaking, Hayasaka’s vision overcame with a blur as he sobbed to himself. Brian stared at him, biting his lip. His eyebrows creased as he thought to himself. Then, he placed a hand on top of the others’.

Brian: “Hayasaka, you didn’t kill anyone. Why do you think that?”

Hayasaka: “I never acted when I should have, and I always spoke when I should have kept my mouth shut. That’s why… That’s why this’ll end in nothing but misery.”

Brian: “You didn’t always speak. Last trial, wasn’t I the one who…”

Brian faltered.

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Sorry? *Sorry* ? How could you be sorry? The one thing we didn’t have to do, yet you did it anyway! Like an idiot!”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: "... *Ah* . For the killer to be found out, someone has to convict them. So, it's their fault that the killer is caught and executed. That's what you believe, isn't it? And, because you've always been the one to do that from the start, that guilt has… piled up."

Hayasaka: "...It doesn't matter. I tried keeping quiet last trial, and Kurumada still died."

Brian: "But you still think it's your fault, because you should have been able to prevent L's death. You think you should have prevented everyone's death."

Hayasaka: "Even if I'm told to blame Nesos for everything, it never felt right. Because if I did, everyone would still be dead either way. But since I never took control, I've just been leading everyone to their graves. It's all just a story, one I can't overwrite. Simply one where I have to watch the ending I've always known from the start."

Brian: "...I never realised how badly this had affected you. I always just thought you were regretful to see your allies die. This is… much worse than I thought. Hayasaka… I'm so sorry."

Brian squeezed Hayasaka's hand tightly, taking a deep breath.

Brian: "You said… You said you think this is all your fault, right? Then… What if we said it's not? How about… We say it's mine?"

Hayasaka: "What…?"

Brian: "I know that might sound a bit stupid, but, if you directed that guilt onto me, then you won't have a reason to be mad at yourself anymore. Then, maybe you'll start to see what you are in control of."

Hayasaka: "Would… that even work?"

Brian: “As long as you stop thinking that way about yourself, I’ll be happy to take the blame.”

Hayasaka: “Happy…? Brian, I don’t understand. Why do you care for me so much? Why are you so content to throw away your own dignity for me?”

Brian: “I… I just want to save my friend.”

Hayasaka: “Save… your friend…?”

Brian: “This might sound weird to you, but on my first day at Sintracorp, I made a lot of friends. And because of my actions, they were put in danger. I could’ve finished my work, and gone home, but… There was this itching feeling in the back of my mind, telling me to stay, to find them, and to save them. I was told this feeling was selfish—that my want to save them was because I wanted them all to be my friend. Truth be told, I had only known them all for a few hours at best…”

Hayasaka: “Does such a thing matter? Even if you desired the validation, what you had done was ultimately a good thing for them.”

Brian: “I guess you could look at it that way, but… It always made me feel quite conscious of my wants going forward. Recently, though, it’s happened again. However, this friend… I haven’t known them for just a few hours. It’s been, what? Maybe almost a month now? The desire to save them won’t go away, but I don’t feel selfish for feeling that way anymore. And, I think it’s because I’m not doing it because I want them to validate me. I’m doing it because *I don’t want them to lose themself*.”

Hayasaka: “Ah…”

Brian: “So… Even if I have to push down my own discomforts for them… And…”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “Ah… I-I’ll volunteer to take care of him until he’s fine to walk again. After all, I was the first one to find him, so I’ll shoulder the responsibility.”

…

Hayasaka: “I’m… I’m truly glad to have befriended you as well, Brian. Despite the situation it took for us to meet, I would be disappointed to have never met you.”

…

Hayasaka: “No! *No* ! As if I want to hear excuses…! You’ve… You’ve screwed it! You’ve ruined *everything* !”

…

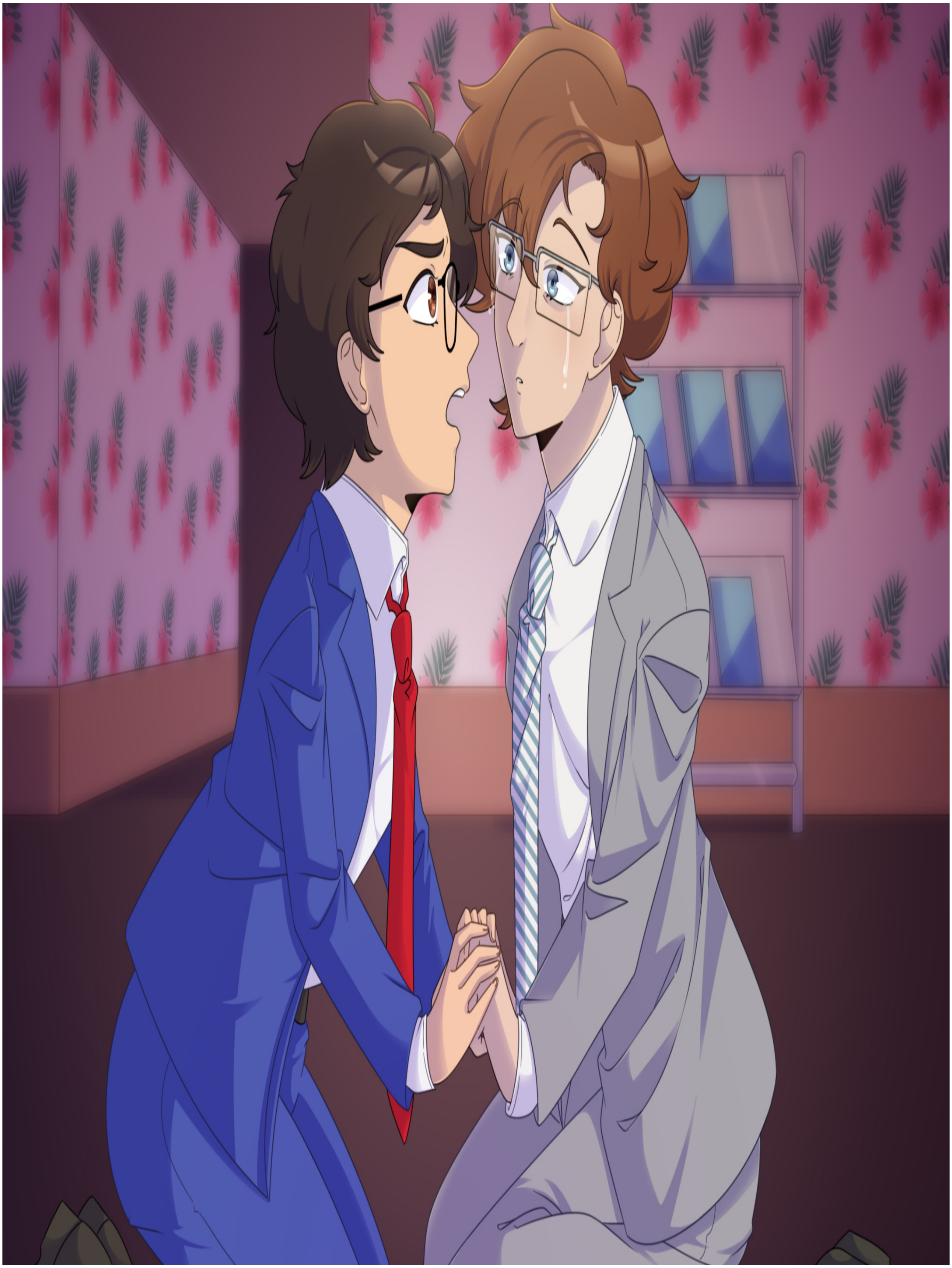
Hayasaka: “...Why’re you putting up with this? I’m not your ally. I’m not your *friend* . I want Kurumada back. I’d rather you had all died instead of him. Is that enough to get you to realise why you should leave me alone?”

…

Hayasaka: “But even so… there isn’t any point in going on.”

FLASHBACK END

Brian: “Even if they’ve told me good things, or bad things, or don’t even know if they’re capable of living… I’m going to save them. No… *I’m going to save you, Hayasaka* .”



Hayasaka could only muster himself to stare back at the other. His gentle, simple words replayed in his mind over and over. Yet, with only those words, a spark grew from within him. A small flicker of something he couldn't describe. It was akin to the feeling that arose when he stood alone in the kitchen with nothing but a knife angled against his neck. That way out.

But just somehow, this one felt *a little better* .

Hayasaka: "B…Bri…"

He didn't have enough in him to finish the other's name, throat heavy and dry. A wetness tickled the corners of his eyes.

Brian: "No… It's okay. If you can't say anything, or if you don't know what to say, it's okay. I think… I can see it on your face."

Hayasaka gave him a weak nod, wiping his eye with his free hand.

Brian: "Heh, s-sorry that got kind of personal. I just wanted you to know that, really. But, hey, now you know my true feelings at least."

Hayasaka: "...Thank you."

A faint smile crept onto Hayasaka's lips.

Hayasaka: "I really… don't deserve you, Brian."

Brian: "Well… I'll be here until you realise you do, Hayasaka."

Hayasaka: "No, don't call me that anymore. You shouldn't have to call me something so impersonal. I hardly ever do this, but… you can call me Shunsuke, if you'd like."

Brian: “Shunsuke…? That’s, uh, your first name, isn’t it? I didn’t even realise until Kurumada said it before…”

FLASHBACK

Hayasaka: “ *Naomichi* …!”

Monotora: “IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!!”

Kurumada: “Hey, Shunsuke. Just watch me, okay? *I’m gonna die a happy man* .”

FLASHBACK END

Hayasaka: “It probably doesn’t sound like a big deal to you, but I’m so used to being referred to with my family name. I’ve never really… fancied the idea of being called by my given name. I didn’t think I’d ever deserve to be by anyone. I wanted my first to be Kurumada, and that’s why I broke my own ridiculous rule by calling him Naomichi first. He only said my name once, but… it was nice.”

Brian: “Then, why don’t you call him Naomichi now?”

Hayasaka: “It feels wrong. Why should I call him something so personal now that he’s dead?”

Brian: “But, he also called you by your first name. Wouldn’t that mean he felt the same way you did about it?”

Hayasaka: “I… suppose you have a point. But, frankly, I don’t care about it all anymore. So, that’s why I offered it, really.”

Brian: “Oh, I see. Well, you know, i-it might take some time to get used to, but I… would like to call you Shunsuke.”

Brian then offered him a hand up, to which Hayasaka grabbed both his arms in order to support his shaky frame.

Brian: “So then, Shunsuke, do you think… You could come and investigate with us? Whatever you find out will be my fault, after all.”

Hayasaka thought back to the encouraging words of the voice, the strong faces of his friends, the uncertainty of where it would all go, and the promise made to him by the man standing in front of him.

Hayasaka: “...Ah, why the hell not?”

Chapter End Notes

> Hey wait a minute. Where's the murder??? Ok fuck this I'm out
>
> Jokes aside, I really hope you enjoyed this chapter. It really was more about the one's still here, than the idea of further distrust. After all, they're gonna need one another for this next challenge, aren't they?
>
> As for the following chapters, they'll be posted whenever they are ready. Be mindful chapter 6 is going to be the most, er, involved, should I say? rubs my grimy hands together mwhaha
>
> If you haven't already, come check out @danganronpa96 on tumblr for rambles/art/updates/opportunities to ask stuff!
> Also, you can join the DR69/96 Discord server here to talk with like-minded, mentally sane (/lh) readers of the fics: https://discord.gg/qSAPq9S

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